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The Kazan Method: Marlon Brando and James Dean

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For my grandfather,
who gave me my first book

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Resumo

O objeto principal desta dissertação é o trabalho do realizador Elia Kazan e a sua contribuição para o "Method Acting". Como tal, o foco será no trabalho desenvolvido pelo realizador com o ator Marlon Brando no filme *On the Waterfront* (*Há Lodo no Cais*, 1954), e com o ator James Dean em *East of Eden* (*A Leste do Paraíso*, 1955). De modo a explorar o conceito de "Method Acting" como uma abordagem à formação de atores, foi primeiro necessário conhecer o seu predecessor o "System". A teoria original por detrás do "System" foi desenvolvida e levada a cabo pelo ator e realizador Constantin Stanislavski, durante o século XX na Rússia. A geração de Stanislavski foi responsável por uma mudança nos temas sociais que eram abordados no teatro, assim como o modo de representação, insurgindo-se contra o teatro clássico que estava por essa altura profundamente enraizado não só na Rússia, mas também por toda a Europa.

O legado do seu trabalho mudou não só a definição do teatro na Rússia, como também ganhou uma legião de seguidores por todo o mundo. Alguns dos colegas de Stanislavski do grupo de representação do "Moscow Art Theatre" nunca quiseram regressar ao seu país de origem depois da digressão destes pelos Estados Unidos da América. Foi lá que se estabeleceram e fundaram escolas e criaram seminários, aproveitando também para difundir os ensinamentos de Stanislavski e muitas das suas derivações.

O realizador americano Harold Clurman começou também por ser um entusiasta da teoria de representação propagada por Stanislavski. As suas capacidades de comunicação tornaram-no um líder num movimento cultural nos Estados Unidos da América em que os autores literários e o teatro se juntaram para levar um certo realismo social e dramático aos palcos americanos. Ao rodear-se de pessoas que partilhavam os seus ideais, Clurman tomou a decisão de formar o seu próprio grupo de atores, o "Group Theatre". Entre os fundadores deste grupo estavam a atriz e professora de representação Stella Adler, o realizador e professor de representação Lee Strasberg, assim como o jovem ator e realizador Elia Kazan.

Kazan participou e teve uma enorme contribuição para o nascimento do "Method Acting". Enquanto Clurman e Adler se mantiveram defensores da abordagem à preparação dos atores através da técnica da imaginação, que foi a posição de Stanislavski no final da sua carreira, Kazan e Strasberg mantiveram-se fiéis à técnica da

memória afetiva, a base original do "System". À medida que o "Group Theatre" começou a divergir quanto aos seus ideais, os atores começavam também a abandonar o teatro preferindo os estúdios de Hollywood e, em 1941, Clurman decidiu dissolver o grupo. Só em 1947 é que voltaria a haver um local onde os atores se pudessem reunir e trabalhar nas suas representações e preparações para papéis, quando Kazan, juntamente com Robert Lewis e Cheryl Crawford, fundou o *Actors Studio*. Nessa altura, Kazan já tinha começado a sua carreira como realizador, acabando por ganhar no mesmo ano o seu primeiro Óscar com o seu quarto filme *A Gentleman's Agreement* (*A Luz é para Todos*, Kazan, 1958). Quando Hollywood começou a exigir mais de Kazan, o realizador decidiu convidar Strasberg para ser professor a tempo inteiro no "Actors Studio", uma posição que este manteve até ao fim da sua vida.

Os dois atores em análise neste estudo foram ambos treinados de acordo com o "Method", tendo frequentado o "Actors Studio". Enquanto que Dean foi aluno de Lee Strasberg, Brando, o ator de eleição de Kazan, e com quem o realizador colaborou tantas vezes quanto lhe foi possível, foi formado por Stella Adler, o que lhe valeu uma abordagem antagónica do "Method" comparativamente à perspetiva do realizador. No entanto, no trabalho que desenvolveu com Kazan, Brando teve como base a memória afetiva e a exploração e revisitação das suas lutas pessoais para a preparação para as suas personagens. O ator teve uma infância difícil, com uma mãe que, apesar de estar fisicamente presente, vivia absorvida na sua luta contra o vício do álcool. Quanto ao chefe de família, Brando Sr., raras eram as vezes que estava em casa e acompanhava o crescimento dos seus filhos. Brando cresceu envolto numa enorme rebeldia, ao mesmo tempo que nunca foi capaz de manter uma relação amorosa saudável. Brando tanto precisava do amor e carinho da sua mãe, como do reconhecimento e orgulho do seu pai, mas ao longo da sua vida nunca foi capaz de alcançar nenhum deles. Kazan explorou o perfil de Brando e todos os ângulos do seu passado para alcançar o que foram, para ambos, os melhores desempenhos das suas carreiras. Com Dean o processo foi algo diferente.

James Dean também teve um crescimento difícil, tendo perdido a mãe aos nove anos, o que fez com que o pai o deixasse a viver com os tios numa quinta no Indiana. Assim que Dean terminou o liceu, mudou-se para Los Angeles para estudar representação e tentar a sua sorte no cinema. Uma vez que as oportunidades que tinha não lhe permitiam atingir os seus objetivos, decidiu mudar-se para Nova Iorque para prosseguir com os seus estudos e juntar-se ao "Actors Studio". Quando Kazan teve

oportunidade de trabalhar com Dean, este já tinha estudado com Strasberg e tinha sido treinado de acordo com a sua pedagogia. Apesar de Kazan não ter ficado muito impressionado com Dean ao início, este acabou por compreendê-lo e apreciá-lo à medida que o foi conhecendo melhor, principalmente depois de ver o resultado final do filme que tinham rodado juntos. Ele escolheu Dean porque todos aqueles que estavam envolvidos na adaptação de *East of Eden* ao cinema, incluindo o autor, admitiram que o ator era a personificação de Cal Trask. Dean tinha dentro de si a personagem que ia representar, assim como todos os traumas e desilusões pelas quais este tinha passado. Kazan, que era um manipulador nato, sabia o que dizer e fazer a cada ator para conseguir destes a reação que precisava para uma cena. Uma das suas estratégias passava apenas por conversar com os seus atores, numa aparente tentativa de os conhecer melhor quando, na verdade, quase como um psicólogo, estudava as suas fraquezas e pontos fortes, e como podia usá-los a seu favor.

Tendo em conta as estratégias utilizadas por Kazan, o presente estudo olha, primeiro, para a história do "System" e do "Method", procurando explicitar como este chegou ao diretor que, mais tarde, o transformou em algo diferente. Por isso, os estudos de caso concentram-se em dois atores que trabalharam diretamente com estes processos e com o realizador. Deste modo, e tendo por base os estudos de Foster Hirsch (b.1943) Stefan Kanfer (1933-2018) e David Dalton (b. 1945), a última parte desta investigação explora os percursos de Brando e Dean, olhando um pouco para as suas vidas pessoais, a sua relação com Kazan e o "Method", e como tudo isso contribuiu para os seus desempenhos em "On the Waterfront" e "East of Eden", obras que imortalizaram ambos, realizador e atores.

Palavras-Chave: "System", "Method", Elia Kazan, Marlon Brando, James Dean.

Abstract

This study proposes to analyse Method Acting in the United States of America under the perspective of the director Elia Kazan. The Method was born from an adaptation of the acting methodology called System, which was developed for *The Moscow Art Theatre* by director Constatin Stanislavski.

With the goal to offer actors of his generation a common training and a space where they could work on their craft, Kazan founded the *Actors Studio* in New York City. One of his most significant feats was that he managed to transfer this acting technique from theatre to cinema, two industries that do not always get along.

Through exercises such as affective memory and physical action, actors approached their characters using different perspectives and layers of meaning, until they reached a state as real as possible. Sometimes the metamorphosis was so genuine and complete that the actors moulded the circumstances of their lives so that they could live like the characters they were portraying, making it hard to understand where the actor ended and their role began.

This study intends to show how Kazan's training and methodology influenced not only his work as a director, but also his selection of actors. The case studies include Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* and James Dean in *East of Eden*, roles that immortalized both actors. With this in mind, and following authors like Foster Hirsch (b.1943) Stefan Kanfer (1933-2018) and David Dalton (b. 1945), the last part of this study is focused on the two actors, their career and personal lives, to better understand their connection both with the Method and Kazan and how these contributed to their performances in the aforementioned films.

Keywords: System, Method, Elia Kazan, Marlon Brando, James Dean.

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Introduction

Method Acting is one of the most relevant and controversial acting methodologies in the United States of America, and it has resulted in the foundation on which current actors and directors conduct their work. We can credit the Group Theatre, established in 1931 by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg, for adapting Stanislavski's System to the American stages, leading to the birth of what is known as the Method. This theory aims to achieve realism in acting and has since then been divided into several approaches, being some of them affective memory, subtext, physical action, subjectivity, motivation and justification. Each Method teacher, whether it is Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, Stella Adler or Robert Lewis, stand by their different techniques and acting practices. For the development of this study, the contrasting methods of affective memory and physical action will be addressed in more detail, since they are the cornerstones of Elia Kazan (in relation to Dean's training) and Stella Adler's Method (in relation to Brando's training) respectively.

Both Kazan and Adler first began as actors, having developed their career together as members of the Group Theatre. When conflicts began within the Group as to which would be the best pedagogical approach, Kazan stood by Strasberg and affective memory, while Adler stood by Clurman and physical action. The reason behind it was that Adler found affective memory to be a wounding technique, and considered that using the same stimuli several times over would result in a predictable result. As for Strasberg and Kazan, they saw it as the most effective way of getting a pure reaction out of their actors. When the Group dissolved in 1941, its members went their separate ways and focused on their own careers. It would not be until 1947 that actors in New York would once again have a common place to work on their acting skills, when Kazan reached out to Lewis and Crawford and together they founded the Actors Studio. Kazan's initial intention was to be a teacher at the Studio, but as Hollywood began to demand more of his time, he invited Strasberg to take his place.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that Method Acting was initially developed in the context of the theatre in the 1930s, and that the people responsible for it were not supporters of the film industry. The reason behind it was that their ideals implied that they worked to build a strong and meaningful collective as a group and refused to be lured into individual calls for fame, as the cinema industry could offer.

Kazan was a pivotal character in the process of transitioning method acting and actors into the cinema during the 1950s, the decade in which this approach to acting gained even more traction and visibility. As a director who was often responsible for casting his actors, Kazan was anything but conventional. Instead of holding auditions, he had meetings, or meals, with actors, and mainly talked to them until he could find the substance he needed for the character in question. This is the reason why, in order to understand how an actor was selected to play a specific role in one of Kazan's projects, we need to know their personal background, since that was the process the director also followed.

We can understand that the logic behind Kazan's casting process is deeply associated with his acting training and beliefs, however we should also question why he chose to build his career telling the stories of complex and multi-layered characters. It is only fair that, as we dive into the biographies of the actors Kazan has worked with, we learn about the director's personal struggles as well. That is how we are able to grasp that Kazan was no stranger to damage himself, and that both his cultural heritage and his upbringing gave him the skills to mask his emotions and live life as a nonconforming outsider. Because of his constant notion that he could never let his guard down, he was convinced that he had to work harder than people around him in order to succeed. Regardless of his many successes he inarguably had throughout his career, he never gained the recognition from his father, whose greatest ambition was that his son followed the family business at "Kazan Carpets Company". When Kazan decided to be an actor instead, he had to make his way into the business, without the support of his family, gaining experience from all the possible positions he eventually held, from making sets, to acting, directing, producing and then teaching.

When Kazan met Marlon Brando, he realised that the actor's deep resentment towards authority figures also came from a failed quest for affection and approval from his overly strict father. That element, combined with an alcoholic and absent-minded mother, made Brando a combination of rebellion and vulnerability, which can be visible both in his personal life and in the characters he portrayed. The fact that these two states were able to coexist inside the complex person that Brando was made him extremely appealing to Kazan, who quickly learned how to play with the actor's emotions and guide him towards the direction he wanted. Another thing Kazan admired about Brando was how disciplined he was as an actor, and for that he credited his training under Stella Adler.

With James Dean the case was no different; on his first meeting with Kazan, the director understood that beyond his image of a bike-riding rebel, was a lost boy looking for a purpose, much like the character he was looking to cast. Dean had an estranged relationship with his father, who had left him to live with his aunt and uncle at the early age of nine years-old, after the boy's mother passed away from cancer. His interest for acting was the one thing he had in common with her, so his family was quick to support him when he announced that he would like to pursue such a career. Because he was younger than Brando, and did not get the chance to mature as a person or as an actor, he did not have a solid acting training when he first worked with Kazan. Dean began to study Method Acting while he was in college, and then briefly worked with Strasberg during the time he attended the Actors Studio. His experience with Strasberg, however, was not a positive one, as he was not prepared to explore his personal trauma in front of a full class of fellow actors and quit after only a few classes. Regardless of his past experience with affective memory, Kazan learned how to work with Dean and found a way to make him comfortable enough to share it in film for all eternity.

Before I describe the concept of Method Acting, and its influence on these two actors, it is necessary to explore its predecessor – the System. In this sense, the first chapter will present the Russian actor and director Constantin Stanislavski and the work he developed in twentieth century Russia, which resulted in the birth of the System as an acting theory. To understand the importance of the System, it is also relevant to outline the cultural and social settings of the time. Stanislavski's generation was responsible for a shift not only in the training and performances of actors, but also in the themes and literary genres that were being taken to the stage in that period. Through journalism, literature and later the world tours of the Moscow Art Theatre, the teachings of this Russian ensemble began to spread during the 1920s. After their tour to the United States of America, some of Stanislavski's colleagues decided not to go back to Russia, and remained behind to establish schools and seminars with the intent of diffusing the director's teachings to a much larger audience.

The second chapter will focus on the evolution of the System in the United States of America, and its evolution towards becoming the Method. We can trace back the starting point of the Method to Harold Clurman, one of Stanislavski's admirers, and his lectures about the importance of representation of social and dramatic realism in the theatre. His rhetoric and charisma attracted a group of followers who shared his ideals and enthusiasm. With the help of Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg, Clurman turned

28 performers into 1 ensemble and called it the Group Theatre. Much as their Russian predecessors, the changes made in the theatre were met by a new literary stream, aimed at representing the struggles of the common working man. After a decade of contribution to the theatre and acting, the Group dissolved due to political and pedagogical divergences in 1941. As a result, the focus of this study turns to director Elia Kazan, and how he resurrected the legacy of the Group Theatre by opening the Actors Studio in New York in 1947. Thus, the second chapter will dive into the director's personal, political and pedagogical struggles, to better understand the decisions he made throughout his career in terms of teaching, directing and casting his actors.

The third and final chapter will begin by exploring Marlon Brando's biography, up until the moment he met director Elia Kazan. After approaching some of the actor's and director's collaborations, first on Broadway and then on film, the main analysis will be on the film *On the Waterfront*. This project is not only rich in examples of the Method from both Brando and Kazan, but it is also relevant in personal terms to the director, since it followed his controversial testimonial before the House of Un-American Activities Committee. This is said to be Kazan's attempt at atonement, however, and as history came to show, it would not be enough to erase his actions from the minds of his colleagues. So much so that this would turn out to be the last time Brando and Kazan's would work together. The study will then focus on James Dean, and his personal path until he was casted by Kazan in his debut role as Cal Trask on *East of Eden*. Both the director and the writer John Steinbeck became fascinated with Dean and the similarities he had with the character he had to interpret. It is then up to Kazan to find the best way to help Dean channel the character within him in front of the cameras. The outcome became the first chapter in the creation of the myth around James Dean, earning him the first posthumous Oscar nomination for best actor in the history of the Academy Awards.

In 1999, when Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro presented Kazan with his Lifetime Achievement Award at the 71st annual Academy Awards ceremony, protesters and several guests in the audience made it clear that the testimony the director had given almost 50 years ago, still carried a lot of weight in people's minds. Actors like Nick Nolte and Ed Harris refused to applaud the 89-year-old director, showing that they opposed the honour that was being presented to Kazan. Regardless of our political or personal views on the impact of Kazan's naming names, we must be able to recognise

the importance and value of his body of work, and how it shaped all generations to come. With this in mind, the study presented here is also a contribution to better understand his life, those he influenced and his films.

Chapter 1

From System to Method

The concept of Modern Acting was first developed by Constantin Stanislavski, in mid-19th century Russia, amidst a social revolution that brought a profoundly nationalist vision to literature and the theatre. Growing up as an aspiring actor, Stanislavsky made it his life's work to breaking the laws of how *An Actor Prepares* (Stanislavski, 1936) into *Building A Character* (Stanislavski, 1948) and *Creating A Role* (Stanislavski, 1957), which lead to the creation of the acting theory known as the System. Author Benedetti acknowledges the importance of the work developed by the director, and admits that it was only possible due to his perseverance to overcome his own creative constraints:

> Had Stanislavski been a 'natural', had his talent – some would say his genius – as an actor found an immediate, spontaneous outlet, there would be no System. As it was it took years of persistent, unremitting effort to remove the blocks and barriers which inhibited the free expression of his great gifts. (…) What we receive as the System originated from his attempt to analyse and monitor his own progress as an artist and his attempts to achieve his ideas as an actor and meet his own developing standards. (2004: 1)

Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was born in Moscow, Russia, the second son of a mercantile family. His parents were extremely devoted to the theatre, and many family gatherings would consist of lavishing balls and occasionally plays would be staged for entertainment. Stanislavski's early memory of his childhood was his first appearance on a small children's stage when he was about two or three years old. On this experience he impersonated Winter, and although he recalls the "aimlessness, bashfulness and the absurdity" of his contribution, he marks the applause at the end as very much to his liking (Stanislavski, 1924: 23). He vividly describes this experience in a chapter of *My Life in Art* called "Struggles with Obstinacy":

> A candle was lit and placed in a small bundle of branches to make the effect of a fire. "Remember it is only make-believe. It is not in earnest," the others explained to me. And I was strictly forbidden to bring the piece of wood close to the candlelight. All this seemed nonsensical to me. Why should I only make believe when I could really put the wood in the fire? And perhaps that was what I had to do, just because I was forbidden to do it?
> In a word, as soon as the curtain rose I put out the hand with the piece of wood towards the fire with great interest and curiosity. It was easy and pleasant, for there was meaning in that motion; it was a completely natural and logical action. Even more natural and logical was the fact that the cotton caught fire. There was a great deal of

> excitement and noise. I was unceremoniously lifted from the stage and carried into the big house, where I was severely scolded. In short I had failed cruelly, and the failure was not to my taste. These four impressions, of the pleasure of success, of the bitterness of failure, of the discomfort of unreasonable presence on the stage, and the inner truth of reasoned presence and action on it, control me on the stage even at the present day. (Stanislavski, 1924: 23)

By the time he was fourteen, his father founded his own theatre from an out-building at his country estate in Liubimovka. A few years later, a second theatre was raised on their Moscow property, and it was at that stage that, in September 5th 1877, Stanislavski would make his debut as an actor. As a result of this performance, and of the theatre's opening, Stanislavski's brothers and sisters, their cousins and a few family friends, started the amateur group "Alexeyev Circle". From his first-hand experience as an actor, Stanislavski began to write dissertations about his own struggles and the ways he found to overcome them. To do so he kept notebooks detailing this inner-work, a practice that he maintained for sixty-one years of activity.

He carried out his interest into becoming an actor throughout his adolescence and early adult life, applying to a Drama school in 1885, at the age of twenty-two. Not long after, he was urged to join his family business in the textile industry, being forced to quit after only three weeks of attendance. In truth, the little time he spent there, Benedetti remarks, was sufficient for "his swift recognition of the fact that the school could not give him what he was looking for – a properly thought-out method of working, a means of harnessing his own natural creativity" (2004: 4):

> Learned professors filled our heads with all sorts of information about the play we were rehearsing. This aroused thought, but our emotions remained quiescent. We were told very picturesquely and with much skill what the play and the parts were supposed to be, that is, of the final results of creative work, but how we were to do it, what road or method to use in order to arrive at the wished for result - nothing was said about that. We were taught collectively or individually how to play a role, but we were not taught our craft. We felt the absence of fundamentals and of system. We were taught practical methods without these methods being systematized scientifically. It was not this that I wanted, it was not for this that I had entered the school. I felt that I was a piece of dough of which they were making bread of definite taste and appearance. I was frightened by the thought that like the rest of the pupils, I would be deprived of my own individuality, bad as it was. And I dreamed of one thing only - to be myself, to be that which I can and must be naturally, something that neither the professors nor myself could teach me, but nature and time alone. (Stanislavski, 1924: 97)

Not only did the school fail to provide such a method, it could not even conceive that such a method existed. His teachers merely asked for specific results, instead of explaining the process in which to achieve them. The most that they could do was share a few tricks they had tried as actors and that had worked for them individually. To Stanislavski that was insufficient, since it was key for him to understand if a good actor was made out of hard work or simple intuition. What had worked for his teachers did not necessarily mean that it would work for him or his colleagues. He needed discipline and a set of guidelines that could be universal and relatable to every actor. As he sought out to find the answers to his needs, he ended up outlining an acting methodology in a field that so far had none. His curious nature made him gradually more interested in learning the secrets of actors, especially in regards to their practice, preparation, and most importantly, the source of their inspiration, as Benedetti highlights:

> What we receive as the System originated from his attempt to analyse and monitor his own progress as an artist and his attempts to achieve his ideas as an actor and meet his own developing standards and it is all the more valuable for being born of concrete activity since the solutions he found were lived and not the result of speculation or abstract theory. The System is his practice examined, tested and verified. Although he received help along the way from actors and directors the System is essentially Stanislavski's own creation. For, while others could define for him the results that were required, they could not define the process by which those results might be achieved. (2004: 1-2).

As Stanislavski's work continued to progress, the Russian theatre did not seem to go in the same direction, entering a time of decline. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Imperial theatres had been largely replaced by commercial managements, whose main focus was on quick profits rather than on artistic quality. Unfortunately for Stanislasvki, it was more likely for him to find examples of what not to follow than the opposite. Benedetti summarizes what would be the most common practices for rehearsals at the time: "First came the reading and the casting of the various roles. Some discussion of the play's meaning was supposed to take place but generally there was insufficient time. The actors were left to find their own way. Then came the first rehearsal." (2004: 5). The cast made their own interpretation of the play and of the role that they were given, and then brought their individual input to the play, which was hardly the ensemble work Stanislavski wanted to see in practice.

Moreover, the directors had little influence on the work of the actors, as did the script, which was often disregarded. The leading actors would make gracious entrances

on stage, positioning themselves on the centre of the set, where they would find the spotlight and adoration of the public. Every actor, main or secondary, positioned themselves front to the audience when delivering their lines, often pausing for applause. These flashy performances still showed traces of an old generation of drama performers, which could still be traceable all around Europe. Authors like Hirsch comment that the performances of that time were: "[t]rivial, riddled with convention, and disrespectful for the rights and talents of the actor, the ensemble, the director, the designer, and the writer, the fraudulent glamour of this reigning style of nineteenth-century Russian theatre had no roots in Russian soil and temperament." (1984: 18). The plays themselves posed another problem, since the most popular ones were translations of French farces and melodramas. The Russian Theatre had no roots in the Russian society, and could hardly represent or relate to its audience, as Gogol notes:

> The strange has become the subject of contemporary drama … murders, fires, the wildest passions which have no place in contemporary society! … Hangmen, poisons – a constant straining for effect; not a single character inspires any sympathy whatsoever! No spectator ever leaves the theatre touched, in tears; on the contrary, he clambers into his carriage hurriedly, in an anxious state and is unable to collect his thoughts for a long time. (1980: 166–7)

In response to this phenomenon, Russia witnessed the birth of a literary stream leaded by authors like Turgenev (1818-1883), Gogol (1809-1852) and Pushkin (1799-1837) and immortalized by Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and Tolstoy (1828-1910). The fields of literature and the theatre at last joined forces to deeply understand and capture Russia's voice and identity. Pushkin, the nation's first literary hero, was a pioneer in Russia's realistic tradition, influenced in part by Gogol, particularly in his collection of short stories *Evening on a farm* (1831). Pushkin believed that the artist's main objective was to "supply truthful feelings under given circumstances", a statement that would later become Stanislavski maxim (Hirsch, 1984: 20). Stanislavski shared the nationalist principles that the Russian theatre should speak for the Russian people and their daily struggles. He wanted to break away from tradition, however, at this point he was only aware of what he wanted to oppose and what he wanted to reach, but not how to get there. According to the director's own account, what he was aiming for was "living, truthful, real life, not commonplace life, but artistic life" (Stanislavski, 1924: 207)". To do so he had to learn how to capture human nature and emotional truth and translate it into art by portraying it on the theatre stages.

One of Stanislavski's role models, Mikhail Shchepkin (1788–1863), whom he classified as "the greatest Russian actor of the first half of the nineteenth century" (1924: 17), was responsible for the development of Realism[1] in acting. To him, Shchepkin was "the educator of an entire generation of great and competent artists. He was the first to introduce simplicity and lifelikeness into the Russian theatre, and he taught his pupils to distinguish the manner in which emotions are expressed in real life." (Stanislavski, 1924:17-18). Shchepkin was responsible for the foundation of Stanislavski's concept and approach to an idealised performance. As Benedetti puts it:

> "He defined what was to become the central problem for Stanislavski: does an actor feel his role or does he imitate its externals? Can the audience tell the difference? (…) why is it that the actor who fakes can win an audience's sympathy while an actor who has worked hard and is 'sincere' leaves them cold? The problem may well be that when he laughs or cries he is doing so as himself, not as the character".
>
> (2004: 23-25).

As he immersed deeper into the theory behind acting, Stanislavski concluded that actors could be divided into two categories: the personality actor, who always plays himself in every role, and the character actor, who undertakes the challenge of getting into the mind of characters themselves. To both directors, however, the latter should be the only approach. It is obvious that the actor's singularity is extremely important, particularly because it can be the determining factor on why they should be casted for a part over any other among their colleagues. The point here is that it should be the actors to lend their innate acting abilities to the concept of the play, moulding themselves to it, rather than the other way around, as Gogol further develops:

> The intelligent actor, before seizing upon the petty oddities and superficial peculiarities of his part, must strive to capture those aspects that are common to all mankind. He ought to consider the purpose of his role, the major and predominant concern of each character, what it is that consumes his life and constitutes the perpetual object of his thoughts, his idée fixe. Having grasped this major concern, the actor must assimilate it so thoroughly that the thoughts and yearnings of his character seem to be his own and remain constantly in his mind over the course of the performance…. So, one should first grasp the soul of a part not its dress. (1980: 169–170)

Another of Stanislavski's sources of inspiration was Cronegk, the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914), the director of a German company celebrated around Europe as

[1] Realism in art is the method which helps to select only the typical from life. (Stanislavski *apud* Benedetti, 2004:17)

a profound example of Realism. In 1890, when Stanislavski was able to see the company for the first time on their second tour of Russia, he was struck by how disciplined the ensemble was. They had gained recognition for the precision of their sets and wardrobe and by the exactitude with which they played crowded scenes but the actors were mediocre. The fact that the actors had little input to give to the end performance, or even to its great success, made this a rather different approach than what Stanislavski was looking for. In this case, all the guidance came from director, and not from the shared work of the ensemble. According to Hirsh, Cronegk's scenic realism was deceptive, as it was merely a way for the director to distract the audience from the actors' lack of acting skills. As Stanislavski matured, he was able to realize that the Cronegk's concept of Realism was external and not internal, as the one he had projected. With the lack of better examples, he tried to follow the director's footsteps at first resorting to realistic sets and costume designs to bring his actors closer to their characters' reality. Additionally, while he looked for inspiration to prepare for his roles, Stanislavski tried many times to recreate the behavior of the actors he admired and whose work he had seen.

From voice to posture, Stanislavski searched in the performances of his peers for details and subtleties that would bring out what he thought to be the true nature of a character. That differentiator factor, in Stanislavski's perspective, could only be achieved by understanding and reproducing the attitudes, expressions and physical posture that his character would have. In order to achieve that, his training began to consist in living similar experiences to the ones of the roles he played, in order to create a wider understanding and proximity that would allow his performance to become more realistic. One example of this practice was the fact that when he prepared to play Othello, he spent a season in Algeria to study the traits of the Arabic behavior.

In 1888, after a first failed attempt, Stanislavski founded his second theatre company and began to stage plays by Tolstoy (1828-1910), Ostrovsky (1823-1886), Pushkin (1799-1837), Goldoni (1707-1793) and Moliére (1622-1673). The work he developed with his actors was regarded as promising and filled with enthusiasm, and it was not long before his company began to stand out among the amateur circle. This came as a turning point for Stanislavski, who received a proposal to become one of the founders of the People's Moscow Art Theatre, as an act of recognition for his work.

When he was given this opportunity, Stanislavski decided that his approach should be different from what it had been in the past. The first visible change was in the

way he decided to choose the actors for his new ensemble. Stanislavski held a careful casting process, positioning himself more as a psychologist than as a director. He judged the actors based on their moral character and their potential evolution within the new concept of theatre that he was trying to create, rather than on their professional experience. He made the choice to let into his company actors with less abilities, but that showed themselves more open to change, and were therefore easier to mould, as opposed to experienced and well-known actors. Any actor that showed indication of commercial features, theatrical fakery, or narcissism, would be quickly dismissed. To become a part of this experience meant to be a part of the first "acting lab" in the world (Hirsch, 1984: 25). To Stanislavski, it was of extreme importance that the actor as an artist could be multidimensional:

> The artist must look at, and not only look at but know how to see, the beautiful in all the spheres of his own art, of all other arts, and of life. He needs impressions of good performances, art, concerts, museums, voyages, and pictures of all tendencies, from the most academic to the most futuristic, for no one knows what will move his soul and open the treasure house of his creative gifts. All tendencies are good which help to create the beautiful life of the human spirit in artistic forms, that is, which reach the fundamental goal of art. Let the artist live, let him be enchanted, disappointed, happy; let him suffer, love and live through the entire gamut of human emotions, but let him at the same time learn to recreate this life and his emotions into art! (1924: 44-45)

Once he had carefully handpicked the members of his new Company, Stanislavski's made it clear that he expected it to work as an ensemble, thus eliminating any difference between actors, regardless of the role they played. In order to achieve a spirit of union, and create a sense of group work, he defended that every actor had to be conscious of one's abilities and not feel tempted to feed off the audience's approval or validation while on stage. Their main focus should be on achieving a pure state of theatre and not on giving the audience what it wants. In Stanislavski's own words: "one must love art and not one's self in art" (1924: 298).

In 1896, for the People's Moscow Art Theatre's first production, *Tsar Fyodor* (1868) by Tolstoy, Stanislavski transformed his actors and designers into students of the 17th century. To prepare them, he took them to libraries, museums and territories in Russia that still had some visible traces of that time. The long rehearsal period was held in Pushkino, where, away from the city and everyone's daily routine, it was possible to develop a collective spirit amongst the group. The result was celebrated as an example

of scenic authenticity, but once again that meant an external realism, and not a spiritual one. Stanislavski had not yet found a way to lead his actors towards capturing the human condition, as he thoroughly describes:

> The actor must first of all believe in everything that takes place on stage, and most of all, he must believe in what he himself is doing. And one can believe only in the truth. Therefore it is necessary to feel this truth at all times, to know how to find it, and for this it is inescapable to develop one's artistic sensitivity to truth. It will be said, "But what kind of truth can this be, when all on the stage is a lie, an imitation, scenery, cardboard, paint, make-up, properties, wooden goblets, swords and spears. Is all this truth?" But it is not of this truth I speak. I speak of the truth of emotions, of the truth of inner creative urges which strain forward to find expression, of the truth of the memories of bodily and physical perceptions. I am not interested in a truth that is without myself; I am interested in a truth that is within myself, the truth of my relation to this or that event on the stage, to the properties, the scenery, the other actors who play parts in the drama with me, to their thoughts and emotions. (Stanislavski, 1924: 440-441).

Stanislavski's second try at this was in 1898, with the play *The Seagull* (1895), by Chekhov. Chekhov's characters could seem simple at a first glance, when in fact they could be decomposed into endless layers of subtext, making them the perfect object for Stanislavski's System. Oddly, for as big as the admiration between the two men was, they never understood each other's art. Chekhov did not like Stanislavski's productions of his plays, and Stanislavski thought that Chekhov did not understand what he wrote. Regardless of this animosity, they shared the same goal: to start an artistic revolution in Russia, and that was what ultimately brought them together.

Stanislavski conveniently chose to name his systematic approach to acting as the System. His goal was to find a way for his actors to deconstruct a character, to the point of credibly turning into it. By portraying the mundane duel between words and actions, which is part of the basic essence of the human nature, he sought to portray characters as conflicted and flawed as the people in his audience. To do so, he needed to implement a lot more than the traditional physical and vocal training that actors were used to, as Hirsch further develops: "'If the ability to receive the Creative mood in its full measure is given to the genius by nature,' Stanislavski wondered, 'then perhaps ordinary people may reach a like state after a great deal of hard work with themselves – not in his full measure, but at least in part.'" (1984: 36)

Although it was clear to Stanislavski that an actor's creative process could never

be narrowed down to one formula, he wanted to find a way to guide his actors through the process of seeking inspiration for a role. His first approach placed the focus on the exterior of the actor by investing in a characterization similar to the one of his character, mimicking gestures, posture and voice tones. He later understood that although those details could help an actor to get into the skin of his character, the greater focus should be on the interior, which would be the purest source of inspiration that they could ever reach.

Unlike some of his disciples, Stanislavski never believed that his System was finished. Throughout his active years, he continuously worked on new ways to release the actor's expressiveness, something that made him change the focus of his work several times. He was not interested in creating talent in actors who had none, but rather in providing the right tools to the ones who had. He wanted to find a process through which the actor would be able to spark his inspiration every time it was needed.

His first approach was through a combination of physical and psychological work, which developed into a technique called "affective memory". The exercise started with muscular relaxation exercises, in order to liberate the actors from any kind of external tension. According to Stanislavski's analysis, the best actors had a quality in common, which made them more calm and receptive to the director's instructions: physical freedom. In his perspective, when actors achieved this state of relaxation they would also respond better to emotional stimuli. Once they achieved the benefits of this external exercise, the director would change the shift to an internal line of work, encouraging the actors to establish a connection with an object, a sensorial or emotional memory, a colleague or a specific part of the stage.

As Stanislavski concluded, it was when the actors were properly relaxed and focused, that they had a larger ability to access the darkest corners of their subconscious, where they would find emotions, memories and images that would serve as sources of inspiration. This strategy allowed them to search through their subconscious for a memory or experience that could relate them to the character they had to play. By creating a parallel between their reality and the one in which the play took place, the actors made themselves believe that they could be subject to the same circumstances, making it easier for them to provoke a genuine set of emotions. Eventually, Stanislavski moved away from this technique when he realised that if the actors based themselves on the same memory every time they wanted to trigger a specific emotion, they would be working with an invariable stimulus. To him, this led to

similar and fabricated performances, which did not serve its purpose.

After stepping away from the affective memory, Stanislavski began to work on a divergent theory called the "method of physical actions". In this new approach, Stanislavski led his actors to engage in a series of physical activities, with the purpose of triggering the emotional response that would be expected from their characters. While the previous technique made the actors dependent on their emotional background to find equivalent or relevant material as inspiration, the method of physical actions allowed them to control their subconscious and guide it towards the emotion/result they needed. By training the actors' behavior and posture on stage, Stanislavski was able to add a different dimension to their performances, as noted by Hirsch: "As student of human behavior, the Stanislavski actor must cultivate keenness about himself and others as a way of life, and must be able to translate his life-observations into theatrical truth." (1984: 41).

It was not long before this new approach to the theatre, developed by Stanislavski and his peers, became larger than its birthplace Russia, drawing the attention of theatre enthusiasts from all over the world. In 1917, among the many people who travelled to Russia to experience the rebirth of the nation's theatre, was American theatrical press agent Oliver M. Sayler (1887-1958). One of the first places he visited was The Moscow Art Theatre, followed by all the Studios that were subsequently founded under its direction. While he was there, he made an effort to familiarize himself with the classicist and anti-Stanislavski companies, as well as every single one in between.

Regardless of their place in the ranking, each theatre company knew where it stood, and most importantly what their ideologies were. He realized that the Russian audience did not look for entertainment or for temporary relief in the theatre; instead they looked for a way to comfort their deepest impulses. What he found, in a country that had just been through the October revolution, left him so in awe, that it became the subject of the book he entitled *The Russian Theatre* (1920). Oliver Slayer had never seen anything like this in the United States of America so, as soon as he got back to his country, he paired up with Morris Gest, a Russian businessman, and together they opened their very own Moscow Art Theatre in New York. In 1923, Stanislavski and his ensemble decided to take a very much-anticipated visit to the city of New York and see the theatre that was founded in their honor. What they surprisingly found once they got there was a country that still considered itself culturally inferior to Europe, and that was

willing to take whatever teachings they had to share. According to Gray, Stanislavski wrote about this experience that:

> We never had such a success in Moscow or anywhere else... No one seems to have any idea what our theatre or actors are capable of. I am writing all this... not in self-glorification, for we are not sharing anything new here, but just to give you an idea at what an embryonic stage art is here and how eagerly they snatch up everything good that is brought to America. (1964: 28)

The decade of 1920 became the landmark for an artistic revolution in the United States of America. The country felt a sense of urgency to see their generation and culture portrayed in literature, drama, paintings and music. Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) was one of the first American writers to carry out the technique of realism, drawing inspiration from the Russian playwright Chekhov. Throughout his career he took on the mission to reinvent tragedy, exploring significant themes and symbolisms of his time. He was one of the many who fed this new literary stream, giving the American theatre the stories and the characters it needed. This was of extreme importance, particularly because it made it possible for directors to move away from the temptation to adapt plays from other countries, or revisit the classics, which was at the time the common trend. Klein & Kaplan, on their documentary *American Masters – Harold Clurman: A Life of Theatre* (1989), display an interview with the well-known American director, where we can see him comment on the theatre of this decade:

> The plays of the twenties were principally imports from Europe, drawing room dramas that had no real connection to our lives. I observed that in most theatres, the actor was hired to do a part and was expected to make it live on stage, but, as an individual, he stood outside the play. So, the result always remained somewhat mechanical. The real purpose of a theatre production, I thought, was to make us more alive, and there was no true personal feeling of significance in any of these works. (Harold Clurman *apud* Klein & Kaplan, 1989)

Around this time, the American theatre had enough money and knowledge to stage productions worthy of making their Russian mentors envious, and a star system that would sell tickets on its own. The only thing that was missing was a theatre company with a common training, a joint evolution and a repertoire of plays that mirrored these new ideals.

During their American tour, the Moscow Art Theatre staged renowned plays like *Tsar Fyodor* in New York, and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), *Three Sisters* (1901), e *The*

Lower Depths (1902) in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Pittsburgh, New Haven, Hartford, Newark, Cleveland and Detroit. The ensemble consisted of Knipper-Chekhova, Moskvin, Kachalov, Leo and Barbara Bulgakov, Ouspenskaya, Tamiroff and Stanislavski (Gray, 1964: 28). By then, the director had already been developing the System and training his students accordingly for 15 years. That experience undeniably brought a sense of truthfulness and consistency to their performances, making them even stronger than what they had been in the moment of their premiers in Russia. Every act created a great impact on the American audience, which sat through the different plays with great enthusiasm. Nevertheless, what was more striking above all was a sense of union that could be felt among the company.

The fact that the Moscow Art Theatre's ensemble chose plays that portrayed a group of characters, either families or political and socioeconomic entities, was undoubtedly intentional. In these representations, there is no elevation of a character above another, since everything one character does automatically affects the rest of the group. The legacy of their performances played a profound role in shaping the American's notion of the theatre as well as the actor's role in a play. While it was common for American actors to be personality actors, carrying out the same persona with them from character to character, the Russian ensemble proved that an actor can truly transform beyond recognition to play a role. This metamorphosis is an essential feature when considering that this group of actors had to continuously find the perfect cast amongst themselves for each role in a play. If the Moscow Art Theatre's ensemble had not developed this ability, its spectators would be looking at an invariable outcome in every one of their productions. The actors could always be the same, but they had the training and the ability to transform themselves into someone completely different every time, as Hirsch further develops:

> As the cynical Satin in *The Lower Depths*, the absent minded avuncular Gaev in *The Cherry Orchard*, and the handsome, lovesick soldier Vershinin in *Three Sisters*, Stanislavski seemed to inhabit three separate bodies. (…) he transformed himself physically, vocally, and spiritually for each of his roles, growing shorter, taller, stouter, handsomer, or sillier as the parts demanded. Neither actor carried an identifiable persona from one character to the next: they seemed to remake themselves for each play. (1984: 56)

Because of their many fans, the Russian company returned to the United States of America for a second season in the fall of 1923. This time the group decided to

change their repertoire in order to include a few comedies, which had been left out of their last tour. This was their way to show the American audience that they also had the ability to perform lighter plays, taking a step back from what the critics saw as "the degraded individuals, morbid, neurotic and vicious, seen in so many Russian dramas" (Hirsch, 1984: 56).

In 1924, Stanislavski and his Theatre decided to go back to their home country, but not everyone was willing to leave. Richard Boleslavski (1889-1937), who was one of the first members of the original ensemble to arrive to the United States of America in 1922, decided to stay in New York to share Stanislavski's teachings. In 1923, along with his colleague Maria Ouspenskaya (1876-1949), he opened The American Lab Theatre, originally called The Theatre Arts Institute. The Lab became the first acting school to promote the System, and was meant for young actors who longed to distance themselves from what the predominantly commercial American theatre had to offer. Ten years later, in 1933, after the Lab dissolved, Boleslavski's career took an unexpected turn, leading him to Hollywood where he became a director. It was during this period of his life that he decided to publish a book on his lectures entitled *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (1933). This would be the first time that the characteristics and techniques of the System were published in the English language, as Hirsch explains:

> Boleslavski stressed the actors spiritual training as the most important part of the work, and he developed a series of what he called "soul exercises" in relaxation, concentration and training of the affective memory, which, stripped of the spiritual overlay, were to supply the foundation for Lee Strasberg's work at the Actors Studio. (1984: 64)

In his work, Boleslavski often refers to a "golden box" as a place where a person can store observations, impressions, and memories, both sensorial and emotional, in a conscious and unconscious way. Through affective memory exercises, the actors work towards finding ways to access these resources. Nonetheless, he made it clear that this approach was only a means to an end: the perfect harmony between body and mind. To Boleslavski, the conscience of the self had no value if the actor was not able to translate it into dramatic actions. One can argue that towards the end of his career, Boleslavski traded his convictions for Hollywood's fame and fortune, but along the way he opened a significant debate that was carried out by a generation of theatre enthusiasts, led by a young man named Harold Clurman.

In 1928, Clurman (1901-1980) was working as a script-reader for the Theatre Guild which, at the time, was the closest New York came to revisiting the Moscow Art

Theatre. Still impressed with the unforgettable performances of the Russian ensemble, Clurman became convinced that he would never witness these kinds of productions on Broadway ever again. In his opinion, the American audience should be entitled to a worthier notion of the theatre than what the Theatre Guild was able to deliver. As a result, he began lecturing on the subject in his room at a West Side hotel, causing a stir among the theatre community in New York. As Stella Adler recalls in Klein & Kaplan's documentary, he attracted a vast legion of followers:

> Surrounding him were many artist, writers, playwrights, poets, actors… All young, he was young, and they groped for understanding. It was not easy to understand him, these words were pouring like dynamite upon the innocence in front of him, and gradually, gradually, not at once, and not even in time that we measured… One realized that this man called Harold Clurman had a dream! – (Adler *apud* Klein & Kaplan, 1989)

In 1929, with the stock market crash and the subsequent Great Depression, the theatre took a hard blow and was struggling to survive. The number of productions became fewer and fewer and, as a result, many theatre houses were turned into cinemas because they no longer had the ability to be profitable. This was a turning point for the theatre and it became clear things that had to change. The only option for the theatre to survive such a critical period was to adjust itself to the times and to the audience's demands. The repertoire had to be different, but the acting also needed a different approach; ultimately, they needed to learn how to speak to the American people. As Brockway narrates on his documentary *American Masters – Stella Adler: Awake And Dream!* (1989):

> The Depression had turned America into a landscape of broken dreams. Out of the ashes of these dreams came voices demanding change. Politics combined with art to create a golden age of American theatre. People had lost their homes, their jobs, but not their souls – Clurman preached. His Group Theatre aimed to cultivate the American soul.

At this point, Harold Clurman did not have the necessary money or the plays he envisioned but, above all, he had "his dream" and it only took him twenty-five weeks to turn it into reality. In the summer of 1931, Harold Clurman, along with Lee Strasberg (1901-1982) and Cheryl Crawford (1902-1986), made the bold decision of starting their own theatre company: The Group Theatre. Each of the founding members became responsible for areas in which they would later specialize in: Harold Clurman became

the Theatre's spokesman and literary adviser, deciding which plays should be staged; Strasberg was responsible for the actors training and directing; and Crawford was left with the financial and logistical administration of the Theatre. This new founded theatre company did not set out to be part of any political movement, however, every single one of its members considered their contribution to be of an immense cultural relevance.

The Group Theatre had a total of twenty-eight actors when it started. Instead of holding auditions for their actors, the three directors conducted a series of interviews oriented towards a psychological approach, something similar to what Stanislavski had done when he had started his own company. Based on their intuition, they selected actors that would better adjust to the new kind of theatre they had set out to create. Their idea was to have a permanent group of actors working together, which they believed would promote a spirit of understanding and cooperation that would later translate into their performances. By developing this proximity, both on stage and outside of it, the actors' work carried a sense of familiarity and credibility, which was very similar to the one of the Moscow Art Theatre's ensemble.

In Clurman's opinion, what made his Company stand out from all the others was the fact that the public could see the sincerity in their work and the fact that they were not trying to put on a show, they were merely replicating people's lives. Together, they made it possible for the focus of their performances to be on the cast as a whole and not on an actor individually. However, it is wrong to think that this was an easy transition to everyone; part of becoming a member of the Group Theatre meant to make all kinds of sacrifices economical and spiritual, but to some extent it also meant the abandonment of their personal aspirations by giving up on the idea of stardom in benefit of the group's ideals, as Clurman expresses on Klein & Kaplan's documentary:

> What is a true theatre? – I asked. It is a body of actors and craftsmen, united on a permanent basis to develop a technique of its own to a body of common attitudes towards life, that the audience more or less shares. Such a theatre may be socially, politically or religiously motivated, but it must develop an identity, a style, a face, a meaning of its own. (Clurman *apud* Klein & Kaplan, 1989)

Following the System's philosophy for the preparation of their first production, the Group moved to Brookfield Central, Connecticut, for ten weeks, where they shared every minute of their days in a commune. Their purpose was to step away from New York, where the mainstream theatre held its roots, and work on the Group's proximity (Hirsch, 1984: 74). During this period, Lee Strasberg managed the rehearsals of Paul

Green's *House of Connelly* (1931) conducting the ensemble under what his interpretation of Stanislavski's teachings was. In face of this new experience, the actors agreed to strip away from every bad habit or previous training, and let themselves be molded by the director's new approach to acting.

In 1931, by the time the Group began to develop their work, *An Actor Prepares* had not yet been published in America, and would not be so until 1937. Until then, Strasberg and the members of the Group could only rely on Boleslasvki's classes and writings to make their own judgement of the System. Strasberg had attended only a few of Boleslasvki's classes, particularly during a period in which the director's focus was on affective memory. This, of course, left Strasberg with a very limited vision of Stanislavsky's theories, which would impact his tendencies as a director himself.

Eventually, many students of the System, including Richard Boleslavski, abandoned the theory of affective memory, but not Strasberg. He strongly believed that this technique could be validated by his readings on Freud (1856 –1939), and that it was the basis to the truthful acting style that he was trying to develop. As a result, Strasberg relied on affective memory and improvisation exercises as ways to liberate the actors from the text, to stimulate their imaginations, and to coerce them into examining their own feelings (Hirsch, 1984: 75-76).

If in 1931 Strasberg primarily trained his actors based on affective memory, during the Group's second season he broadened his spectrum to also include speech and body posture classes. John Howard Lawson (1894-1977), an American writer who would later become a part of the Hollywood Ten[2] was responsible for two of the plays staged during that period: *Success Story* (1932) and *Gentlewoman* (1934). Harold Clurman was particularly fond of Lawson's work because he found it to be contemporary and a rough description of "what money does to people when you have it and what it does to people when you don't" (Hirsch, 1984: 87), a very pertinent subject during the Great Depression. The Group was now getting closer to portraying the new kind of theatre they had once envisioned. Nevertheless, its strong unit was beginning to break into two groups: the ones who supported Strasberg's inner work and the ones who questioned his guidance and preferred to focus on the training of their voice and body.

[2] A list of 10 prominent screenwriters and directors who refused to testify before the HUAC, receiving jail sentences and being banned from working for the major Hollywood studios as a result. Their names were: Alvah Bessie (c. 1904-85), Herbert Biberman (1900-71), Lester Cole (c. 1904-85), Edward Dmytryk (1908-99), Ring Lardner Jr. (1915-2000), John Howard Lawson (1894-1977), Albert Maltz (1908-1985), Samuel Ornitz (1890-1957), Robert Adrian Scott (1912-73) and Dalton Trumbo (1905-76).

Affective memory was not an easy technique, given that it would imply bringing up painful memories to surface, or even exploring traumatic experiences, that one might have already learned how to cope with. To some students, these exercises have even proven to be a particularly painful and damaging process. Phoebe Brand (1907-2004), a respected actress and acting teacher, who was also a founding member of the Group Theatre, had a strong opinion to share about the director and affective memory:

> I lent myself to it for a while – it is valuable for a young actor to go through it, but it is too subjective. It makes for a moody, personal, self-indulgent acting style. It assumes an actor is an emotional mechanism that can just be turned on. Emotion can't be worked for in that way - it is rather a result of a truthful action in given circumstances. Lee insisted on working each little moment of affective memory; we were always going backwards into our lives. It was painful to dig back... Lee crippled a lot of people. (Brand *apud* Allen, 2002: 111)

Actress Stella Adler (1901-1992), the daughter of Jacob Adler (1855 –1926), a renowned actor of the Yiddish theatre, and then wife to Harold Clurman, was also among the ones who fought Strasberg on the subject. In 1934, on a trip to Paris, Adler got in touch with the Russian director and shared the work that the Group Theatre had been developing in America. At that point Adler was strongly convinced that the experience had ruined her joy of acting. Stanislavski was very surprised to learn that Strasberg was still working on a technique he had already left behind, so he took the opportunity to tell Adler: "If my System doesn't help you, don't use it… but perhaps you're not using it correctly." (Stanislavski *apud* Hirsch, 1984: 78). The two spent the following weeks working alongside Stanislavski's secretary, in order to try to decode what they understood was being made of the System in America. Because it was not in the director's interest to see a misinterpretation of his work, he proposed to outline his theories again. By the end of this experience, Adler believed that Stanislavski had validated her approach to acting training through imagination instead affective memory. This, however, contradicted everything that Strasberg defended and practiced within the Group:

> The central disagreement, I would say, is that the theatre exists 99% through the facility of the imagination, and Mr. Strasberg insisted that that was secondary […] The actor has in him the memory of everything he has ever touched, or tasted, or eaten. And he is gifted by nature with memory. He can go very far back, and he does go very far back, and, under very simplified circumstances, you can urge him to extend himself. (Adler *apud* Brockway, 1989)

In 1935, the Group decided to stage a play written by one of their own members, Clifford Odets (1906-1963), called *Waiting for Lefty* (1935). Odets matured with the ensemble, sat through their classes, was moved by the same ideals that brought them together, and was responsible for giving them the voice that they were looking for since Clurman's talks in the late 1920s. Not only was he "the nearest to understand or feel this American reality" (Clurman *apud* Lahr, 2015), but he also made sure that "American lives were raised up to art, where bitterness, loss and sorrow are annealed and soothed and even at times made triumphantly comic" (Hirsch, 1984: 93). His characters can be compared to the ones written by Chekhov, since they both represent a specific social class and era. The difference between them was that while Chekhov's aristocracy is declining, Odets' American Jewish community is rising. In Hirsh's perspective, it is even possible to compare the social importance and accuracy of Odets work, with writer F. Scott Fitzgerald's depiction of the 1920 only a decade before:

> The thirties – the America of bread lines and soup kitchens, of strikes and unemployment, of union meetings and Communism cells – quickened Odets's artistic imagination the way the twenties – the decade of parties and good times – had aroused Fitzgerald's. (1984: 89)

Waiting for Lefty revolves around a taxi drivers' strike, which was carried out at a time when taxi drivers did not even have a union that would fight for their rights. It follows a group of taxi drivers, taking the audience through a series of five flashbacks, each portraying difficult episodes from the men's lives. In the end, they come to the sad realization that there was no purpose in waiting for Lefty, because he had died while standing up for the taxi drivers and their struggles. The apotheosis of the play comes at that very moment when a group of actors rises from the audience and yell: "Strike, strike, strike!", both moving the audience and stirring a round of enthusiasm. Among the cast was assistant stage manager Elia Kazan (1909-2003), and even Odets himself. Of the occasion he commented: "I found myself up on my feet shouting 'Bravo!'... I forgot I wrote the play, forgot I was in the play... The proscenium arch disappeared." (Odets *apud* Miller, 1991: 83). With every act, the audience joined in cheering, applauding, and whistling, as if they were a part of the commotion. At the end there were twenty-eight curtain calls, and the audience was left in awe for over twenty minutes. The moment can best be described by the words of Harold Clurman:

> The first scene of [*Waiting for Lefty*] had not played two minutes when a shock of delighted recognition struck the audience like a tidal wave.

> Deep laughter, hot assent, a kind of joyous fervor seemed to sweep the audience toward the stage. The actors no longer performed; they were being carried along as if by an exultance of communication... Audience and actors had become one. Line after line brought applause, whistles, bravos, and heartfelt shouts of kinship... When the audience at the end of the play responded to the militant question from the stage: Well, what's the answer? With a spontaneous roar of Strike! Strike! It was something more than a tribute to the play's effectiveness, more even than a testimony of audience's hunger for constructive social action. It was the birth cry of the thirties. Our youth had found its voice. It was a call to join the good fight for a greater measure of life in a world free of economic fear, falsehood and craven servitude to stupidity and greed. Strike! Was Lefty's lyric message, not alone for a few extra pennies of wages or the shorter hours of work, strike for greater dignity, strike for a bolder humanity, strike for the full stature of man. (1945: 147-148)

It was right after this joyous moment that the Group suffered a big loss. Stella Adler returned from Paris, with a renewed confidence from all the information she had gathered from Stanislavski, and decided to confront Lee Strasberg with it:

> It's polluted water, and yet Americans continue to drink it. Stanislavski himself went beyond it. He was like a scientist conducting experiences in a lab; and his new research superseded his earlier ideas: the affective memory belonged to the old, worn-out ideas. But Lee always thought it was cornerstone of the Method, and in this way he became a laughingstock. (Adler *apud* French, 2016: 524)

Strasberg stood by his interpretation of the System, and refused to put aside his theories and beliefs. He saw no other option except to retire, and went on to develop his own acting guidelines: The Method. Harold Clurman took his place as director on the Group's next productions, the plays *Awake and Sing!* (1935), *Paradise Lost* (1935) and *Golden Boy* (1937), all of them written by Clifford Odets. While the training of the actors was the main focus for Strasberg, Clurman favored the content and the message of the plays that were staged instead. Nevertheless, to authors like Forest Hirsch, Clifford Odet's work was the perfect combination between Harold Clurman's talks and Lee Strasberg's teachings, so there was no surprise when Clurman continued to bet on Odets as the main writer for the Group. The appreciation between Clurman and Odets was visibly mutual, as the writer would often describe him as his "favorite character outside of fiction" (Chinoy, 2013: 153). Harold Clurman used his time leading the Group to lecture the American audience on his favorite problematic of Dreams vs. Materialism, conveying the message that money should not be a central part of life; a

topic that spoke to the heart of every American going through the Great Depression. Arthur Miller (1915-2005), the renowned American playwright, found that to be one of Clurman's best features:

> He really thought, Harold did, that through dramatic art, through acting, through terrific plays, you civilize humanity; that they would stop killing one another. (…) That the theatre was a field of jurisprudence, it was more important than the courts; it was certainly as important as any church, informing men. Therefore his ideals were immense, his ideals was like a founding father. (Miller *apud* Klein & Kaplan, 1989)

While Odets continued to write for the Group, releasing *Rocket to the Moon* in 1938), and *Night Music* in 1940, he traded the theatre for Hollywood in 1936. Although none of these plays ever surpassed the success of his previous works, they became financial successes, something that fell far from the Group's ideologies. Most of the profits he made, however, he used to support the Group Theatre, remaining truthful to their common mission. In 1937, it was time for Cheryl Crawford to resign, and after that it was not long before the Group began to dissolve in Harold Clurman's hands.

As a last attempt to save The Group Theatre, Harold Clurman decided to let Hollywood stars into the ensemble, thinking that it would help increase their revenue by selling more tickets. This dramatic change made a lot of the founding members angry, given that it represented a deviation from their original values. At the same time that Hollywood was joining the Group, some of its older members were joining the film industry, as it was the place where the money was. It was not surprising that this led to an even bigger animosity between the Group members who, in their majority, were never in favor of abandoning the pure state of the art of acting in exchange for the fame and fortune of Hollywood. Later, Strasberg and Kazan would relax their antagonism on films, but most of the Group members held true to their original categorization of them as anti-art (Hirsch, 1984: 108).

In 1941, ten years after the enthusiastic Group came together, their profit was no longer enough to support its more than twenty members. In total, they had produced twenty-one plays that revolutionized the American theatre for future generations. This meant the end of this organization, but it did not mean the end of the cultural movement triggered by the Group Theatre. With each member going on a different direction, and following the methodology that they believed in, there were many classes, institutes and studios that set out to continue the Group's legacy, as Wendy Smith observes:

> When members later spoke in later years of the Group's breakup, they all used the same metaphor: they'd lost their home, they said; their family was gone, and they felt terribly alone. Without the Group the theatre seemed a cold, forbidding place, a forbidding arena where they had to compete as individuals, cut loose from the collective that had sheltered them and nourished them for ten years. Many of them would spend large proportions of their lives trying to create another Group, a place where they would feel at home. (1990: 412)

Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), a German emigrant, was one of the first people to understand the need to perpetuate the Group's work. He founded The Dramatic Workshop with the objective of introducing a few differences to the Group's approach. His school was meant to make room for an open debate, by having acting teachers with different methodologies, sharing their input and professional experience with students. Even though Piscator never agreed with Lee Strasberg or Stella Adler's ideas, he invited them to join his new school. It was not a matter of not believing in Strasberg's realism in acting but, from where he stood, Piscator believed that actors should develop more skills beyond that. As such, he trained his actors to be "able to do anything, to play any style, to be a dancer, a choreographer, a scholar" (Hirsch, 1984: 119). He believed that the actor could develop his own theory of acting and, by doing so, they would "learn to see the world not through the senses only, as in Stanislavski, but to move away from the individual, as in Brecht. (…) We are conveying ideas more than emotions" (Idem).

In the Group, the actors had the possibility to freely interpret the playwright's intentions through the creative process of shaping their characters. However, in the Workshop they were taught to closely follow the director's interpretations of the plays. To Piscator, the director was the intermediary between the writer and the actors, and their will should always prevail. Taking into considering the actors' training while working with the Group, this was a very difficult ideology for them to accept. Unfortunately, the Workshop failed to connect and represent the American spirit of its time, and eventually came to an end. As a result, Lee Strasberg went on to teach at the American Theatre Wig and Stella Adler founded her Conservatory.

By shedding a new light on the actors' training, and keeping the Group's spirit alive, Piscator's Workshop had a very important purpose, serving as an inspiration for the Group's most consistent heir. Cheryl Crawford, one of the Group's founders, had remained close to a few of her colleagues after quitting in 1937. One of them being Elia Kazan, with whom she would occasionally meet for lunch. On one of those meetings in 1947 the two came to the conclusion that, after the end of the Group Theatre's, there

was no place in New York where actors could get together to work on their performances (Hirsch, 1984: 117). With this in mind, Crawford, Kazan, and Robert Lewis (1909-1997) made the decision to start the Actor's Studio.

At first, the structure of the Studio was fairly simple: Elia Kazan taught the initiation acting classes; Robert Lewis taught the advanced acting classes; and Cheryl Crawford was responsible for managing the finances and logistics, in similarity to what she had done for the Group in the past. The board decided that the purpose of the Studio was not to stage theatre productions like the Group had, something that meant that the organization did not need as much money to survive. Adopting a completely different approach than its predecessor, the Studio focused on providing a common training to actors as individuals, and not as an ensemble. To some extent, this could be seen as a more realistic take on an actor's training, since upon being casted for a role, they were assessed for their individual skills and strengths, and not by their ability to become a part of a cast. This might also be the reason why some people stood by the idea that "The Studio is a commercial enterprise, dedicated above all to creating stars" (Hirsch, 1984: 120), and many of the members of the original Group ensemble never approved of the work they developed, and made a point of distancing themselves from it. Nevertheless, the Studio remained close to the System and conducted many of its classes according to its acting theories.

In order to join the Studio, the actors had to be invited by one of the founding members; but this also meant that they could be asked to leave at any time. It was only after one year of activity that they decided to hold auditions for the first time, and made the Studio's membership valid for life. It was precisely amidst all these changes and adjustments that Robert Lewis decided to leave. What weighted more on his decision was his disagreement with Elia Kazan regarding the future of the Actors Studio. In his perspective they should make the Studio profitable by organizing plays with its members, but Kazan decided against it. With Lewis gone, and Kazan being more and more solicited both by Broadway and Hollywood, it was clear that someone had to step in and ensure that the students had a full-time teacher. In 1949, Kazan made the smart move of asking Lee Strasberg to join the Actors Studio because, if anyone, he knew that Strasberg was more interested in pedagogy than fame, as Hirsch describes:

> Strasberg said he was not a teacher but a moderator working along with Studio members in a close study of actor's problems. Strasberg made it clear that the Studio was not a school but a lab for actors who have already had voice and body training and who were now ready to

> do inner work on themselves to see what was getting in the way of a fluent expressiveness. (1984:124)

Ever since the Group's disputes over Strasberg's interpretation of the System, many of its members distrusted the work of the director, so when he was invited to teach at the Studio, the animosities grew even stronger. Regardless of the public opinion, this was the part that Strasberg was set to play, and he did so for almost thirty-five years. By staying true to his vision of the System, and developing his own Method, he became responsible for popularizing the kind of acting revolution that was initiated by the Group. More than living by the Russian teachings the Group so firmly followed, he established rules of his own and defined a true American style of acting.

Chapter 2

The Kazan Method

Stanislavski's contribution to the field of acting has been essential in the guidance of many actors, directors and theatre companies. It is possible to see how each teacher (be it Clurman, Strasberg or Kazan) has a different interpretation of the System, focusing on a specific feature of Stanislavski's theories, which helps them support their approach to acting. Kazan might not have invented the Method on his own, but he was responsible for a great part of the development of this acting theory in the theatre, and later in cinema as well. If these two industries did not seem to be close during the times of The Group Theatre, Kazan found a way to reconcile them.

Elia Kazan, like many directors of his time in the American film industry, was not born in the United States of America. He was born in Constantinople on September 7th, 1909, to Athena Shishmanoglou (1888-1975) and George Kazanjioglou (1878-1960). His mother belonged to a well-respected family of cotton merchants, who were responsible for importing goods from England, and then selling them to both Greek and Turkish merchants. Athena grew up in a wealthy neighbourhood in Constantinopla, in a house with servants, and enjoyed a status in Turkish society, which allowed for her family to have access to culture, and for the men to carry out an education abroad. Elia's father came from a completely contrasting reality than his wife's. His family lived in a poor town in Kayseri, with very few conveniences, where riots and slaughters were quite frequent. During this troubled period, the Greek community was known to keep to themselves and rarely leave their houses, simply as an attempt to survive, as Kazan himself explains:

> (...) their tactic for safety was to blend in with the Turkish population. In Kayseri, the women stayed at home for the most part, but when they went out they covered their faces as did the Turkish women, and they stayed within the bounds of the Christian neighborhood.
> The men, (...) from the instant they walked out of their front doors, (...) said hello and goodbye in Turkish. On the streets they wore a mask of deference. They survived by "passing." The tactic persisted when some of these people came to America. In New York, many merchants in the rug trade had family names of Turkish derivation but concealed their Christian forenames, even in our polyglot city. By compressing them into initials. My father's brother, the man who brought us to America, was known in New York not as Avraam Elia Kazanjioglou but as A. E. Kazan. (1988: 20)

Tired of the life they had in their home country, Avraam was the first to seek refuge in the United States of America, at the age of twenty. George soon followed his brother, getting a job as second in command at Kazan Carpet Company, Inc. As soon as

he could save some money, he called for Athena, their two sons, and the rest of their family. Elia Kazan soon found a new home in a Greek ghetto in New York, where he was raised sharing the same building with his aunt, uncle and grandmother. At home they spoke both Greek and Turkish, with Kazan later recalling: "I speak the language of the oppressed and the language of the oppressor equally well." (Kazan *apud* Ciment, 1974: 9-11). The family kept the mentality of being foreigners, in a new country, and held on to the sentiment that they could not freely associate with the American people. They often struggled to incorporate their Greek Orthodox values in a mainstream America, so they resorted to their old survival tactic of "getting by", as Kazan explains:

> When Father had first came to America, he must have felt that he was still in a hostile and threatening environment—after all, he could not speak the language—so he continued to behave in New York as he had among the Turks, guarding himself to be circumspect, always beyond criticism on the streets and in the marketplace, always ready with his smile of compliance. He'd learned to get by on his cleverness and never say anything that might be misinterpreted. He learned to survive by cunning, by guile, and by restraining his real reactions. He couldn't afford to behave truly on the streets or in his store. He had to please and flatter his customers. A salesman has to sell himself before he can sell his goods. He preserved his life by pretending respect for what he feared and even despised. In Turkey, he'd learned what Anatolian Greeks learn: how it was necessary to be in order to survive. (Kazan, 1988: 17)

Kazan, just like the rest of his family, always felt like an outsider himself, and remembered that, instead of playing outside like any child of his age would, he was kept segregated, classifying it as the type of "segregation a minority imposes on itself (...) to keep things pure, but really it was the result of terror, of fear." (Kazan *apud* Ciment, 1974: 12). The person he felt closest to was his mother, with whom he admittedly shared "a secret life together, which Father never breached", calling it at times a sort of "conspiracy" (Kazan, 1988: 33). Some authors, like John Lahrs, described him as the "'undisputed darling' of his mother Athena, the 'special child' she adopted as confidant and husbandly stand-in." (Lahrs *apud* Kazan, 2010: xii). Kazan recognized that he was very close to his mother and would not have amounted to anything without her. In contrast, he had not been able to have a frank conversation with his father his whole life (Kazan, 1988: 14). In an interview with Michel Ciment, he elaborated on the topic:

> In Greek families, we were brought up to be afraid of our parents, not to be loved by them or to love them, I mean our male parents, and we were brought up to stay home. I did not play with any children until I

> was eleven years old. I don't even remember any single 'outside' person in my life until I was eleven. (Kazan *apud* Ciment, 1974: 11-12)

Against all odds, Athena convinced her husband to send their son to a Montessori School at the age of five, where he developed a particular interest for reading. At night, once the household chores were done, and the youngest children had gone to bed, mother and son read together. Kazan would later say that during his childhood he lived "through the adventures of Tom Swift, then on to O. Henry and so to *Treasure Island* and *Les Misérables*", always finding the comfort he needed in books (Kazan, 1988: 35). From the beginning Athena invested much in the development of her son, and in his opinion perhaps he "represented what she thought she might have been if she'd not been swallowed alive by a marriage" (Kazan, 1988: 35). As for George, the most important thing was that Kazan had a religious upbringing, and that, as his oldest son, he began to learn the family business. Although neither Athena nor Kazan could admit it out loud, with the risk of disappointing and upsetting George, they both had very different plans in mind. Unfortunately, Kazan never managed to live up to his father's standards, and even earned the nickname of "Good-for-nothing" (Kazan, 1988: 34).

By the time he was in High School, the family had moved to New Rochelle, and Kazan either spent his time at the public library or sneaking in to the movie houses, where his passion for films was first sparked (Kazan, 1988: 38). His High School teacher, Miss Shank, played a significant role in the course his life would take. She was the first to spot his potential, and strongly encouraged his mother to consider William's College, something George would undoubtedly disapprove. Supported by his mother and his teacher, Kazan submitted his application in secret, and began to save money from every part-time job he could find to pay for the admission fee, including his summer jobs at his father's store. As he remembers from that time:

> It must have been evident to everyone at the store that I was going to fail to honor the eldest-son tradition. I'd sit in the back with the largest ledger open in front of me and, concealed in its fold, Samuel Butler's *Way of All Flesh* or Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. I got caught reading, was called to the floor and given a broom. "Sweep!" When I helped open the carpets to show customers, I seemed to be in a fog. Often, I was spoken to and didn't answer. Feeling my father's wrath building, I did my best to pretend some interest in rugs. But it didn't work. Father referred to me as "Hopeh-less case!" I said nothing. I was learning to take punishment without defending myself

> or fighting back. I still do that. Father stopped introducing me to his customers. He no longer said, “Charlie”—or whoever—“meet my son Elia.” I didn’t blame him. I knew that I was an embarrassment to him. (Kazan, 1988: 40)

When George found out that his son had been admitted to William’s College, and that he would not be following in his footsteps, he blamed his wife Athena. Hers and Kazan’s plan was no longer a secret, and he could go on to enjoy what he believed was his calling in life. Athena was left to face the consequences of supporting her son’s choices; not only did her marriage suffer a toll, but she also began to sleep in a separate room from her husband. Kazan deeply resented his father for lashing out his “dammed-up anger (...) at home, against his wife and his offspring, particularly the one who’d disappointed him by not observing the tradition that sends the eldest son to his father’s side in the family business.” (Kazan, 1988: 17). To George, his son had walked away on him to follow a trade with no future and, because of that, he deeply resented him as well. They could never truly repair their relationship, and even later in life, when Kazan would sometimes find his father showing clippings of his shows to his old friends, he recalled that in those moments he “pitied him but still didn’t love him” (Kazan, 1988: 18). It would only be many years later, when Kazan visited his father’s birthplace, that he would be able to reconcile with the image he had of him. Unfortunately, at that point it was “almost too late” and he “was left with a persisting regret that [he] had never come to know [his] father.” (Kazan, 1988: 18). The discouragement he felt growing up came to deeply affect and shape the man that he would grow up to be:

> I generalized (...) that the most precious things in life were forbidden by authority (my father) and that everything I wanted most I would have to obtain secretly. I learned to conceal my longings and to work to fulfill them surreptitiously. (...) It was necessary. From that philosophical conclusion it was only a short step to this one: What I wanted most I’d have to take—quietly and quickly—from others. Not a logical step, but I made it at a leap. I learned to mask my desires, hide my truest feelings; I trained myself to live in deprivation, in silence, never complaining, never begging, in isolation, without expecting kindness or favors or even good luck. To do without good luck! What a fate! To never expect an improvement! To consider rejection inevitable! But I learned to keep coming back, to persist. I hardened. And since what I wanted most I didn’t get, not nearly, I learned to live as an artist lives, empathically, observing, imagining, dreaming, all behind the mask. (1988: 39)

Unlike what he had expected, Kazan spent most of his years at Williams waiting tables and washing dishes, making only two friends during the whole of his stay there, being one of them his roommate Alan Baxter (1908-1976). When he was not working, he would be in his room reading, instead of trying to fit in or getting accepted into fraternity houses just like the rest of his colleagues. He did not find other boys to be friendly to him, and that made him feel even more hostile and lonely. His position in American society became clearer to him at that moment; he knew what he was: "An outsider. An Anatolian, not an American…" (Lahr *apud* Kazan, 2009: xi). It seemed that his reality was much different than the one of his peers. The struggles he had to endure during his childhood, as well as his teenage years, shaped him into a bitter and insecure young man. This turned out to be a decisive factor that would influence his political choices later on, and it contributed to him developing a few defense mechanisms of his own. From this point onwards, he began to turn his achievements and successes into means of revenge from all of those who did not believe in him. Fame was his shield from all the sense of humiliation he was subjected to while growing up, as Jeff Young further explains:

> Already Elia had developed his own version of the "Anatolian smile" that he had inherited from his ancestors. It was a smile that hid everything – fear, rage, resentment, frustration, even love and joy. It was a smile that allowed him to get along in the world, to avoid being beaten up because he was an outsider. It was a smile that defined him as a person constantly at war with himself. Behind that mask he could plot his revenge, develop a means to prove he was better than any of "them". (1999: 9-10)

After graduating from Williams College in 1930, Kazan discovered that Baxter had been accepted at Yale's School of Drama to study acting, so he decided to apply as well. His father's reaction to it was a blunt "Didn't you look in the mirror?" (Kazan, 1988: 17). In some of the parts he came to play, not being a handsome boy was in his favor, however, in many aspects of his life, it became a wounding matter. It is even said to have fed his "particular appetite for vindictive triumph – his compulsive ambition and his habitual, unrepentant womanizing". (Lahr *apud* Kazan, 2010: xi). His experience at Yale was not much different than the one he had in college, as he would often struggle to identify with the classes and the people there. The one thing he seemed to have liked the most about Yale was the time he spent with Baxter's girlfriend, a girl named Molly Day Thatcher (1906-1963), who was the complete opposite of Kazan. She came from a

prominent New England family, her father was a lawyer and her grandfather had been President of Yale. Perhaps that was what made her seem so desirable in Kazan's eyes, and it did not take long before the two began a love affair. His friend amicably understood their new arrangement, and decided to not get in their way. Against the will of Molly's family, the two got married and remained so until Molly's death from a cerebral hemorrhage in 1963. Even though the two shared a respectable and loving marriage, Kazan often engaged in extramarital affairs. Authors like Briley consider that: "In his relationship with Molly, Kazan always seemed to perceive himself as the immigrant outsider who was never quite accepted into American life despite earning acclaim and financial rewards as theatrical director, filmmaker, and writer." (2016: xvii). Even in his most significant personal relationships, Kazan could not separate himself from his old familiar sentiment of not belonging.

While Kazan was at Yale, he worked mainly on stage productions, assisting with everything from sets construction to lighting. The reason behind it was that he truly believed that, if anything, "he might make a living working backstage as an honest craftsman" (Young, 1999: 10). Because he was such a skillful man and could always find a solution to every problem on set, he earned the nickname of Gadge (from the word gadget), and even though he did not identify with it, it was kept by some of his close friends:

> From the mid-1940s through the '50s and on into the first two years of the '60s, I was the most successful director at work in America, but I was in a turmoil of revolt, and it was against myself. I didn't like my public person. I wasn't the man I wanted to be. I despised my nickname, for instance: Gadget! It suggested an agreeable, ever-compliant little cuss, a "good Joe" who worked hard and always followed instructions. I didn't feel that way, not at all. (Kazan, 1988: 9)

In 1932, when Kazan moved to New York, he applied to work as an assistant stage manager for a recently created ensemble called the Group Theatre. He brought with him the experience he had gathered during his years at Yale and, in order to find his place there, he always showed himself available to do any type of chore, cleverly making himself indispensable. During this period, he showed how versatile he could be: not only did he write plays and act in them, but he also took on responsibilities as stage manager and assistant press agent. Group member Herb Ratner (1910-1973) remembered that in the ensemble's first summer, Kazan "was able, not only to design

the sets, cut the wood, but also to put them up for a new show every week, which he did extremely well" (Neve, 2009: 2-3). The Group Theatre was perhaps the most important part of Kazan's training, because it was at that moment that he became an apprentice to Harold Clurman (1901-1980) and Lee Strasberg (1901-1982). Both directors studied under Richard Boleslavski (1889-1937) and Maria Ouspenskaya (1876-1949), original members of the Moscow Art Theatre, and were the closest link the American theatre ever had to Stanislavski's teachings.

The Group Theatre was a company that can be classified both as visionary and revolutionary for its time. One of the reasons that made them stand out was the plays they selected: not only were the majority of authors American, but also their content was of rich patriotic and social value, focusing on common topics in everyday life. In a documentary by Annie Tresgot, Kazan indicates that the work of the Group "was a complete change, it was a movement against the narcissism of the old theatre where actors essentially showed themselves off. For the first time it brought dignity to the feelings, and emotions, and experiences of the common man." (Kazan *apud* Tresgot, 1982). One interesting aspect of the work that the Group developed was that, although they represented many social problems of their time, they intended to remain politically neutral and hence did not associate with any political party. This, however, was not an easy task, since most Group members were also associated with the Communist Party, and could easily blend their political agenda with the ensemble's objectives. Many decisions regarding what plays were chosen, or how to approach to them, were often originated in the headquarters of the Communist Party and then taken to The Group's team meetings by members of both organizations. The Communist Party understood the social importance that The Group Theatre could have on the American audiences and found it an interesting mechanism to promote their ideals:

> One of the things the CP [Communist Party] leaders always wanted to do was to get as much money as possible out of everybody. They were very short on money. The other thing they wanted was for us to take over the Group Theatre. The strike play was *de rigueur* at that time; if you were in a theatre and could write anything, you wrote strike plays. (Ciment, 1974: 15-19)

Elia Kazan was one of the Group members to be affiliated with the Communist Party, having admittedly joined in 1934. To him, at that time, he was finding out what it meant "to belong to a collective", and how the theatre could be "a weapon in the class struggle" (Neve, 2009: 3). In reality, he was looking for a place where he could fit in,

maybe as a way to fight all the prejudice he found while growing up, and to create awareness for a social class he found to have no voice, as he explains:

> I think the reason why I later joined the Communist Party and turned against everybody was born at Williams. I had this antagonism to privilege, to good looks, to Americans, to Wasps... I always imagined society was hostile to me until quite recently; till I was almost fifty, I was not able to talk freely (…) (Kazan *apud* Ciment, 1974: 12)

Clifford Oddets (1906-1963), one of the Group Theatre's most active voices and frequent playwright, joined the Communist Party in the same year as Kazan. In his first attempt to capture the ensemble's ideals, he wrote *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), a play that echoed the voice of the people and of the common man. During the mid-1930s, the country was still recovering from the Depression and it was in the hands of democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. The New Deal and the National Industrial Recovery Act were being implemented gradually as a way to restore the country's prosperity, and generate jobs. At the time, people were either fighting to find a job (the average unemployment rate was around 25%, however in cities like Lowell, Massachusetts, it went as high as 90%), or fighting for better working conditions and wages, in case they were lucky enough to have one. The timing was perfect to lecture to an American audience about change and socialism, because it was sure to reach the masses. Odetts took some inspiration from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), trying to portray the sense of desperation and lack of hope that the Depression Era had triggered, and invited some of his connections in the Communist Party to contribute in the creative process. Kazan later classified this moment as a first attempt to "take the Group Theatre from Clurman and Strasberg and make it a Communist theatre." (Kazan *apud* Ciment, 1974: 15-19).

However, he also had a relevant part in the story. On *Waiting for Lefty* Kazan played the character of Agate Keller, whose speech perfectly illustrates *The Manifesto*'s visions of capitalism and of the working man. Agate does not impose himself as "red", but he performs a communist salute on stage, and his lines suggest that the communists have helped him more than anyone ever did. According to several reviews and personal accounts, Kazan truly took the stage by storm with his character of Agate Keller and his cry for "STRIKE!". Not long before, in 1934, New York had experienced a taxi strike and, as expected, the subject was still fresh in people's minds. Clifford Odets took a contemporary struggle and combined it with his natural ability to speak to the audience,

in a way that would make them relate to the play. It is possible to feel the energy in Agate Keller's vibrant final speech, and even though it cannot possibly have the same impact on readers today as it did back in the 1930s, we can still imagine what made this play, and actors who were a part of it, stand out the way they did, as the example below reveals:

> AGATE. (crying) Hear it, boys, hear it? Hell, listen to me! Coast to coast! HELLO AMERICA! HELLO. WE'RE STORMBIRDS OF THE WORKING-CLASS. WORKERS OF THE WORLD… OUR BONES AND BLOOD! And when we die they'll know what we did to make a new world! Christ, cut us up to little pieces. We'll die for what is right! Put fruit trees where our ashes are! Well, what's the answer? STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!!! (Odets, 1962: 31)

After *Waiting for Lefty*, Odets went on to write several other plays for the Group. Still in 1935 he wrote *Till the Day I Die* (1935), *Awake and Sing!* (1935) and *Paradise Lost* (1935), which were all acclaimed productions. Towards the end of the 1930s, and until 1940, he wrote a few less successful plays that could not quite capture the Group's spirit like the early ones did: *Golden Boy* (1937), *Rocket to the Moon* (1938), and *Night Music* (1940).

By the end of 1936, two years after he had joined, Kazan decided to dissociate himself from the Communist Party. One thing that is clear from his interviews since then is that this decision was not made entirely by him, but rather came as an imposition. Around this time, the party had become more insistent on taking over the Group Theatre, and insisted that its members followed their direct instructions. Kazan had been complicit in bringing the influence of communist principles to the Group on several occasions but, when it came to questions of leadership, he stood by Clurman and Strasberg's views that the Group was meant to be an artistic organization and not a political one. The Communist Party trialed Kazan for his refusal to follow their orders and categorized him as a foreman, insinuating that he occupied a position between the workers and the bosses. The trial took place in Lee Strasberg's house, even though neither him nor Clurman were communists, but Strasberg's wife was, and she decided that it should take place there. As Kazan explains to Michel Ciment:

> I was the only one who voted for myself. Everybody else voted against me and they stigmatised me and condemned my acts and attitude. They were asking for confession and self-humbling. I went home that night and told my wife "I am resigning". But for years after I resigned, I was still faithful to their way of thinking. I still believed

> in it. But not in the American Communists. I used to make a difference and think: "These people here are damned fools but in Russia they have got the real thing," until I learned about the Stalin-Hitler pact and gave up on the USSR. (1974: 22)

For Kazan it was not an easy transition. He idolized the Russians, he read the texts they wrote on American consumption and he "believed the lies they told" (Chinoy, 1976: 533). He adored their theatre, especially Meyerhold, Vakhtangov or Stanislavsky, and even dedicated himself to the reproduction of their methods. He felt connected to an utopian notion of a society in which he had never lived, more than the one he had been raised in.

By 1937, in the midst of all of the Group's newfound success and attention, two of its founding members, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford (1902-1986), decided to resign from the Group due to artistic differences. At this point Harold Clurman took over the board and decided to rearrange the advisory committee, making Kazan and Robert Lewis (1909-1997) members and head teachers. At that time Kazan already occupied the position of Clurman's key lieutenant and executive (Neve, 2009: 3), so this seemed like the next step to take in his career. Possibly as an indication of trust, in 1938 Harold Clurman gave Kazan his Broadway directorial debut with the Group theatre's production of Robert Ardrey's play *Casey Jones* (1938). Since the play was well received, Kazan had another try in 1939 with the play *Thunder Rock* (1939), by the same writer.

Kazan admired Harold Clurman deeply, because to him he had been his "(…) teacher not only in the specific arts of the theatre but how to live a life in the arts" (Neve, 2009: 3). He became inspired by some of Clurman's techniques in terms of preparing and analyzing dramatic texts. Clurman's techniques consisted in taking notes in three columns, on the blank pages opposite the script pages, about issues relating to character, sub-text and mood, and business, something that author Brian Neve (2009: 3) claims that Kazan adapted "loosely and inconsistently" to his own work.

Unfortunately, the combination of mentor Clurman and apprentice Kazan was not enough to save the Group from its decay. More and more members were beginning to leave the theatre for Hollywood, where they could find profitable careers, willingly trading their romantic vision of the Group's pure art for fame and money. Even when Clurman decided to make a box office profit out of the Group's performances, that was still not enough to pay all the bills, and the idealistic organization ended up dissolving in

1941. It was Elia Kazan and Robert Lewis that accompanied Clurman on the day that he had to turn the keys on the Group's office for the last time (Smith, 1990: 412). The remaining Group members each went their own way: Clurman married Stella Adler (1901-1992), an actress of the Group and continued to teach acting classes; Adler remained in New York where she worked as an actress, director and teacher. Robert Lewis moved to Los Angeles and pursued an acting career. Some of them would reunite later on, but others turned their back on their former colleagues and never wanted to have anything to do with the Group again. Kazan, on his end, continued to invest in his directing career and in 1942 achieved his first Broadway success with the play *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) by Thornton Wilder.

In 1944, at the age of 35, it was Kazan's time to make his move to Hollywood when he signed a non-exclusive seven picture contract with Twentieth Century Fox. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945) was the first film he directed, and its cast included Dorothy McGuire, Joan Blondell and James Dunn. Coincidently or not, the film revolved around the subject of immigration, a theme that was very close to Kazan himself, telling the story of an Irish family striving to survive during a Depression Era America, while coping with the father's drinking problem. Kazan mentioned on several later interviews that he is not exactly proud of his first works as a director, but there is one thing we know he had very clear on his mind from his early career as a director – how to cast his actors, as he explained to Jeff Young:

> In the theatre if you need a guy to play a drunk, you got an actor who probably had some experience with drink, but more importantly someone who you knew was good at playing those kinds of scenes. In film you try and get the real thing itself. Jimmy (James Dunn) had been run out of movies for drinking. He was largely unemployable and felt ill at ease at the studio. (Young, 1999: 19-20)

Kazan believed that in order to achieve a good and convincing performance, the actor would have to find an internal path to become that character. The process should be to find a parallel between the story of the play, or screenplay, and one's own life's story, or a similar incident in one's life. The principle of the Method meant that the actors had to understand and explore the characters truth, the circumstances around them, as well as what moved them, in order to get into their psyche. Kazan's work as a director went beyond simply conducting or photographing a scene, he was also actively involved in selecting the actors he would be working with. To him this was an extremely thorough process, considering that he was looking for traces of the characters

within the actors, rather than just another excellent performer. Instead of screen tests, or script readings, he made it a point to get to know the actors before he even considered working with them. His method would sometimes be to engage in seemingly spontaneous conversations, in which he tried to get the actors to give away personal details of their lives, or in which he could assess their train of thought and natural reactions. Once he believed he had what he needed to work with, Kazan would take that initial input to help the actors shape into the part they had to play, until they became the part themselves, as he explains:

> As a director, I do one good thing right at the outset. Before I start with anybody in any important role, I talk to them for a long time. I make it seem casual. The conversations have to do with their lives, and before you know it, they're telling you about their wives, their mothers, their children, their infidelities and anything else they feel guilty about. You're storing it away. You're getting your material. By the time you start with an actor, you know everything about him, where to go, what to reach for, what to summon up, what associations to make for him. You have to find a river bed, a channel in their lives that is like the central channel in the part. (…) You're in a position of trust, and the actors who trust you continue to tell you more. They work with you in an internal way. (Kazan *apud* Young, 1999: 20-21)

As the great director that he was, Kazan knew how to play his actors and their emotions; he was a master at manipulation. He knew how to trigger them in order to get the results that he was looking for, and since he knew private details about their lives, which they had willingly shared with him at an early stage of the production, he knew exactly which memory to bring up before a scene took place, in order to get the genuine emotion he wanted. However, he would not do it directly, because he would then risk getting caught by the actor and damage the element of trust between them, or even create a blockage between the two; instead, he did it ostensibly on a purely made-up basis, in other words, by creating a fantasy in which he tied in elements from the actor's life. He tried to do it in a way that would get him as close as possible to the actor's life experience, to make sure that the person's emotions would be affected, as he explains:

> I take walks with them, I go to dinner with them, I'm not looking for line readings, I'm looking for someone who can experience the experiences of the role, right? (…) And so, you get to know the actor completely, or the actress, completely by your social intercourse with them. And gradually you say she has got the part in her. Inside that person there is the part somewhere. I think of an actor as a person with various personalities (…) and you have to make sure that inside the

> artist, the actor that you choose, that one person that you need exists.
> (Kazan *apud* Tresgot, 1982)

Kazan had a casting process similar to the one Stanislavski implemented when he founded the Moscow Art Theatre, since we can say that he acted more as a psychologist than a director. Yet, he felt the need to be even more meticulous than his Russian predecessor. Instead of casting actors to work as part of an ensemble, taking into consideration their methamorphosical abilities to transform from role to role, like Stanislavski had, Kazan had the meticulous task of casting an actor that would be perfect for a specific role. As Neve further indicates:

> Kazan cites approvingly the notion of the Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold that dialogue was 'the decoration of action', but he also wanted to go further in film in discovering 'what's going on in the hearts and feelings of the characters'. He expressed a desire to provoke and photograph authentic behaviour from his actors, so that the dialogue becomes secondary to looks and behaviour that become 'pieces of real experience.' (2009: 13)

He took into account the actor's ability to become the character. He wanted the artificiality of the acting process to be reduced to a minimum, and to work with actors that either shared his ideology or that would let him exercise his influence on them. There is no need to cry to show that you are feeling sad, or to yell when you are feeling angry. It is that subtle ability to show without telling that Kazan wanted to reproduce. There are countless actions that can replace the obvious ones when portraying a state of heart or mind and, by doing so the actors have the ability to add a different dimension to their speech. Kazan was also a very astute director in the sense that he knew when to tune down the manipulative influence he exercised on his actors, and let them work solely on their instincts. He recognized that not everything can be the work of a director, and sometimes chose not to take credit for some of his movies' most famous sequences, like the case of the scene "Contender" in *On the Waterfront* (1954) with Marlon Brando.

Before he shot any big sequence, he went to lunch or dinner with his actors, spent some time with them, gave them all the support and confidence they needed to truly sink in the role. Before the scene began, he talked to them individually, not to make them feel pressured or exposed by getting directions in front of everyone on the set. Throughout his belief in his techniques, he was also able to recognize that these techniques did not work with every actor, and sometimes he had to adopt a different position, as he explains to Young:

> I always varied in one way from the so-called Method. I didn't work with every actor in the same way. It depended on their individual training. If you make someone feel like they are lacking, or out of it, all of a sudden their confidence is gone. You mustn't score off an actor – or anyone else – for your own favour. You've got to keep their confidence up. If their method is good, you respect the way they work. And you must be careful about the actors you pick. The more power I got in the business, the more I chose just the actors I wanted. For a while I was very lucky. (Kazan *apud* Young, 1999: 24)

After the Group came to an end, Kazan divided his time between Broadway productions and Hollywood, but it would not be long until he realized that there was something missing in the American theatre. The void that the Group left was very difficult to replace, and yet there was still a need for the actors to find a place where they could go to and work on their craft. Kazan did not intend to create an ensemble like the Group had been, or even a theatre where he would have seasonal performances, but instead he wanted to found a studio where actors could interact, rehearse and get guidance on how to improve their work. With the help of Group members and personal friends Cheryl Crawford and Robert Lewis, Kazan started the Actors Studio in New York:

> The Studio itself had started in '46. When I came back from the war there was nothing here, and there was nothing to take the place of The Group Theatre. The Group Theatre collapsed in 1940 and there was no place for actors to work, for actors to meet, for actors to try things out... There was no home for actors in this city, and Bobby Lewis, Cheryl Crawford and I decided that I would start a small, studio, actually a studio, not a theatre (...) and it's made really a revolution of the theatre, or more precisely, continued the revolution that The Group Theatre started. (Kazan *apud* Tresgot, 1982)

The initial list of actors included names like Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Mildred Dunnock, Karl Malden, Kim Hunter, Julie Harris, Patricia Neal and Eli Wallach, some of whom would later work with Kazan. Since its early days, the Studio became a launching platform for many actors, both of the theatre and cinema. Kazan became a lecturer for beginners' classes, working with them on exercises, improvisations, and challenging their spontaneity and sensory awareness (Neve, 2009: 17). Kazan was always considered a key figure at the Studio, but Hollywood had begun to demand more and more of him.

In 1947 he directed the film that would earn him his first Academy award for

Best Director, *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947). That was the same year in which the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) reached its climax. The HUAC had been founded 9 years prior, in 1938, as a committee of the United States House of Representatives, with the purpose of investigating Communist and Fascist organizations. Under the leadership of J. Parnell Thomas (1895-1970), the Committee had developed a strong bond with the FBI, who had intensively investigated Hollywood's communist ties with the help of several informants. Because of its uncontested popularity, the focus was at that moment on the film industry, due to the influence that it could exercise on the American audience.

In that same year, the HUAC called a group of nineteen witnesses to testify before the Congress about their past and present association with the Communist Party. Understanding that the admission to having communist ties would most certainly have a profound impact on their careers, most witnesses decided to either pledge the 5th Amendment or cooperate with the investigations. Ten of them, however, decided to denounce and condemn these practices by refusing to cooperate in naming fellow communists. This group of ten screenwriters, producers and directors were, as a result of their decision, held in contempt of Congress, and subjected to prison sentences. The worst consequence of their refusal to testify was the Waldorf Statement, issued by the main Studios' representatives in November 1947, stating "that they would not re-employ any of them until they had purged themselves of contempt and declared under oath that they were not Communists." (Neve, 2009: 36). The "Hollywood Ten", as they came to be known, were banned from Hollywood and blacklisted from working in the film industry. Their names were Alvah Bessie (1904-1985), Herbert Biberman (1900-1971), Lester Cole (1904-1985), Edward Dmytryk (1908-1999), Ring Lardner Jr. (1915-2000), John Howard Larson (1894-1977), Albert Maltz (1908-1985), Samuel Ornitz (1890-1957), Adrian Scott (1911-1972) and Dalton Trumbo (1905-1976). At this time, the position of Elia Kazan before these events seemed very clear, as Neve recalls:

> Among the 'Hollywood Ten', those of the 19 who actually testified, Edward Dmytryk and Adrian Scott had been called before the Committee because of their involvement as director and producer of *Crossfire* (1947), the first completed film attacking anti-Semitism. In a *Variety* ad published during the week when the unfriendly witnesses testified to the Committee, Kazan's name was listed among those protesting that any 'investigation into the political beliefs of the individual is contrary to the basic principles of our democracy', while he also wrote to Scott at the time offering his support. (2009: 36)

Despite his position, Kazan was lucky enough to be able to continue with his work unharmed, taking in several projects at a time. Still in 1947, after directing *All my Sons* (1947) by Arthur Miller, his wife Molly influenced him to take one of Tennessee Williams' plays to Broadway: *A Streetcar named Desire* (1947). Its production ran for a little over two years (3 December 1947 – 12 December 1949), and during this time Kazan penned in his notes that to him "Directing is turning Psychology into Behaviour" (Neve, 2009: 34):

> The Method [i.e., Method Acting] also gave me a way of getting the psychology clear, of charting the progress of a character through a film. Tennessee Williams did not agree with me – he said I was exaggerating, that it came from my Communist days when we thought people became clear and better with time. He thought people went on behaving the same way all their lives. He has a tragic view of life which is not mine; I would agree with him only in the sense that I believe our characters are our fates. (Kazan *apud* Ciment, 1974: 40)

Kazan had a lot of material to work with between the central characters' memories, emotions and thought-provoking chain of events. Neve claims that Kazan contemplated the play as "a 'poetic tragedy' in which Blanche, 'an emblem of a dying civilisation', was confronted with Stanley, a figure who also had social resonance in terms of 'the basic animal cynicism of today.'" (2009: 34). The producer of *A Streetcar named Desire,* Irene Selznick (1907-1990) wanted John Garfield (1913-1952) to play the male leading role of Stanley Kowalski, but Kazan got her to settle for Marlon Brando instead. Kazan and Brando had previously worked together in a play by Maxwell Anderson called *Truckline Cafe* (1946), which Kazan produced, and Harold Clurman directed. *Truckline Cafe* was not particularly successful, and it was shut down after only 13 performances. *A Streetcar named Desire* was not Brando's stage debut, but it was the play in which he made his mark on Broadway, being in some cases compared to Kazan's performance in *Waiting for Lefty,* as Schulber further comments:

> No other actor has ever rocketed to overnight stardom on the Broadway stage as Marlon Brando did in 1947, in Tennessee Williams's steamy play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. There have been some memorable debuts in the American theater—I still remember Elia Kazan, the director of Streetcar, in his acting days, shouting "Strike!" at the curtain of Clifford Odets's stirring agitprop play *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935—but nothing will ever compare to the explosion set off by Brando in his savage portrayal of Stanley Kowalski, the brutal blue-collar tormentor of his defenseless sister-in-law, Blanche DuBois, who has come to take refuge with him and his

> wife. I will never forget the impact Brando had on me and the rest of the audience. This was beyond a performance. It was so raw, so real, that you wanted to run up onto the stage and save the poor woman from his taunting abuse as he ripped away her pathetic pretensions. At the same time, you were afraid the out-of-control Kowalski would flatten you if you dared interfere with his sadistic, sexually threatening fun. (Schulber, 2005)

To Kazan, "[t]here was nothing you could do with Brando that touched what he could do with himself", considering that "[i]n those days he was a genius. His own preparation for a scene, his own personality, armament, memories and desires were so deep that there was very little you had to do, except tell him what the scene was about." (Kazan *apud* Young, 1999: 81).

After he finished the production of *Streetcar*, Kazan reunited with then friend Arthur Miller to direct *Death of a Salesman* (1949) on Broadway. Around this time the two began to discuss the possibility of Miller writing a screenplay based on his knowledge of the struggles of longshoremen in Brooklyn and the Italian community of Red Hook, which would later turn into the basis of the script of *On the Waterfront* (1954). With so much on his hands, Kazan finally decided to get some help for the Actors Studio and brought in Lee Strasberg, the man who chose pedagogy over fame. After only two years, in 1951, the teacher was named artistic director of the Studio, a role that he would perform for the next thirty years of his life.

After directing the film *Panic in the Streets* in 1950, Kazan decided to approach John Steinbeck about a character that had been on the back of his mind for the previous four years: the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. The collaboration between the two would later result in the film *Viva Zapata* (1952), with Marlon Brando in the leading role. However, another project got in the way, and production was delayed.

After some resistance at first, Kazan agreed to work with producer Charles Feldman in the adaptation of *A Streetcar named Desire* (1951) to the big screen. He only became convinced when Tennessee Williams himself asked him to be a part of the project. He re-casted Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter (1922-2002) and Karl Malden (1912-2009) from the Broadway production, but replaced Jessica Tandy (1909-1994) in her role of Blanche DuBois with Vivien Leigh. Up to this date, Marlon Brando had only been in one film prior to *Streetcar*, so Vivien Leigh (1913-1967) brought the film the star status that the studio required. Leigh was then married to Sir Laurence Olivier (1907-1989), one of the most acclaimed British actors of all times. Olivier had deep

roots in the Shakespearian theatre and his classic acting training clashed in many ways with Kazan's Method. Authors like Jonathan Bignell remark that, despite their different approaches to method acting, there was one thing that Adler, Clurman and Strasberg could agree on: "[…] to do away with the mannered style referred to as 'the British School'. Strasberg used British acting, and particularly the performances of Lawrence Olivier, as a caricature against which to contrast the 'natural' stage or screen presence of Method trained actors." (2008: 3). To make things worse, Olivier had directed his wife in the London production of the play, in 1949, in what we can presume was a much different approach than Tennessee Williams's. This did not pose as an easy task for Kazan, who struggled a lot to work with the two at first:

> For the first three weeks, I was as miserable as I've ever been. I didn't like Vivien Leigh, though I came to love her by the end. She kept saying, "Well, Larry and I in England…" and I'd say, "You're not doing it with Larry now, you're doing it with me, and I don't like it that way." And she said, "Don't you think it's possible – Larry had this idea." And I said, "I guess it's possible, but we're not going to do it that way." She'd get irritated with me and I'd get plenty angry at her. But gradually we got to like each other, mainly because I thought she was such a terrific worker. We began to sweat each other. By about the fourth week I'd got over my resistance to her and to the whole enterprise. I recognized and accepted the fact that I was just going to photograph the play. (Kazan *apud* Young, 1999: 80)

As an author, Tennessee Williams believed that Kazan's "passion for organisation" and for "seeing things in sharp focus" (Neve, 2009: 33) were complementary to his own work. This time, the director's interpretation of the play would not be as easy as it had been in 1947, on the stage production. He now had to dodge censorship mechanisms such as the Production Code Administration and the Legion of Decency, in approaching such aspects of the play as the "sex perversion" of Blanche's husband homosexuality; the rape scene between Blanche and her brother-in-law Stanley; and Blanche's experience of prostitution (Neve, 2009: 33). Fearing that the picture would be "castrated", Kazan warned the studio: "If someone spits in my face, I will not say it's raining." (Neve, 2009: 39). It is even said that, at a certain point, he expressed to Tennessee Williams a willingness to take his name off the picture (Neve, 2009: 33). Nevertheless, the production went on. In his second approach to *A Streetcar named Desire,* Kazan meant to bring a deeper dimension to the character of Blanche DuBois through lightning and photography techniques that would not have been possible in the theatre. "He wanted to use what he called 'Subjective photography',

using the camera to 'penetrate Blanche and then showing the SUBJETIVEZED source of emotion'. (…) He wanted Blanche to be seen as intelligent, and as a woman with humour – Don't overdo "insanity" at the beginning', he urged himself: 'You tell not the literal facts as the observer might see them. You bring directly to the screen BLANCHE'S WORLD.'" (Neve, 2009: 36).

The experience was very absorbing to Kazan, and as soon as he was able to distance himself from the compelling world of Blanche DuBois, he decided that it was time to get back to the film he had put on hold: *Viva Zapata* (1952). Curiously, Marlon Brando was not his first choice. Kazan had his heart set on Jack Palance (1919-2006), with whom he had previously worked with on *Panic in the Streets* (1950), while the studio was after Tyrone Power (1914-1958). Brando is obviously known for his chameleonic acting skills, but he was missing one of the character's main features: a Latin heritage, and that was why he was not an obvious choice for this role. Anthony Quinn (1915-2001), who played the role of his brother on screen, was one to speak against the casting of Brando, because he thought he would be a better fit for the role. In truth, that was not the first time the two actors had been compared; Anthony Quinn also played Stanley Kowalsky in a *Streetcar Named Desire* in Tennessee Williams's road tour.

Some critics at the time considered his performance to be superior to Brando's, who had been responsible for setting the tone for the role. Kazan had his best weapon at hand: two actors divided by a deep sense of competitiveness, but also brought together by an immense sense of respect. He did not do anything to ease the tension, but instead he used it as much as he could in his favor and to get the best performances out of both actors. Anthony Quinn would go out to win an Oscar for his performance as Best Supporting Actor, and Marlon Brando a nomination for Best Actor in a Leading Role.

In 1952, Kazan's communist past would finally catch up to him, when the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) approached him to testify before Congress. When faced with the difficult decision of denouncing his friends and fellow filmmakers or losing his job and the possibility to continue his craft, he chose the latter.

In his testimony Kazan named, among others, fellow Group Theatre member Clifford Odets, whose communist tendencies were obviously visible on most of his writings. Briley confirms that Odets gave Kazan permission to name him, prior to his hearing in Congress, knowing that it would imply that he too would be called to testify (Briley, 2016: xvi). Nevertheless, the playwright is said to have lacked the mental

strength of the director, and some claim that his inability to handle the outcome of his testimony might have led him to his premature death (idem). Kazan's testimony soured his long-time friendship with Arthur Miller, as well as many others, and earned him a lot of criticism along the years. The director never directly apologized for his actions, and stood by what he thought was "the more tolerable of two alternatives that were, either way, painful, even disastrous and either way wrong for me. That's what a difficult decision means. Either way you go, you lose." (Kazan *apud* Briley, 2016: xvi).

In 1953 Kazan got the chance to go back to work and directed *Man on a Tight Rope* (1953) with Fredric March (1897-1975), Terry More (b. 1929) and Gloria Grahame (1923-1981). The film was a clear anti-Communist propaganda that the Studios at the time felt pressured to release. As for Kazan, due to the most recent events of his career, he was equally urged to take on the project. The year after that, in 1954, he decided to revisit the screenplay called *Hook,* about the community of Red Hook, he had once started with Arthur Miller, however at this time he was no longer able to count with his collaboration. The author declined to write the script when the FBI approached him and requested that he depicted the mobsters as communists.

Kazan then turned to Budd Schulberg, who delivered *On the Waterfront* (1954). The director knew who he wanted to cast for the role of Terry Malloy, the atoned pugilist with mob associations: Marlon Brando. There was only one problem, Brando initially turned down the script that Columbia Studios and producer Sam Spiegel had sent them, and Frank Sinatra, a man well familiar to the mob himself, was already lined up to take his place. Kazan, however, was not one to quit, and wanted to make sure that he got the right man for the part. According to Richard Schickel's biography of Elia Kazan, the director drew a plan to convince Brando that consisted on running a few screen tests with a young and promising new student of the Actors Studio by the name of Paul Newman (1925-2008). Kazan expected Brando's competitive nature to react, and as the story shows, it did. Brando got the part and history was made, as Lahr further explains:

> Brando's acting style was the performing equivalent of jazz. The notes were there, but Brando played them in a way that was uniquely personal to him. In his ability to call out of dialogue a heightened sense of emotional truth, the freedom of his stage behaviour was mesmerising and revolutionary. Instead of making everything learned and clear, Brando let the lines play on him and rode his emotions wherever they led him. (2014)

On the Waterfront was a well-acclaimed film and earned Kazan the Oscar for Best Picture and Best Director. To some extent it is often considered to contain autobiographical elements in the character of Terry Malloy. The film begins with Terry assisting a group of mobsters commit the murder of Joey Doyle, even though he was not aware that his actions would lead to the man's death. We learn that Doyle met his faith because he was cooperating with the police and denouncing the illegalities that were being committed by the union responsible for the waterfront. As a result, the population fears the backlash of the mob and refuses to share with the police what they know, fearing that they will also be punished. Terry, whose brother is a mobster who has made him jeopardize his future as a boxer by losing the biggest fight of his career so that his associates could make a profit at the betting houses, receives a fixed income from the mob and also counts on their protection. What he did not count on was that he was to meet and fall in love with Joey Doyle's sister Edie and, because of that, end up in a transformation process that would lead him to atonement. In the end he becomes aware of the weight of his actions and decides to take a stand and go to the police, becoming the one who turns on the union:

> Just as Kazan testified against Communist Party influence in the entertainment industry, Terry must take a stand against the corrupt union controlling the waterfront. The film is usually interpreted as justifying Kazan's cooperation with the HUAC. *On the Waterfront's* conclusion, however, also provides an alternative and more ambivalent political reading. While the workers now follow Terry rather than the corrupt Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb), Mr. Upstairs remains in command of the waterfront, and the workers still exercise little independence within a closed system. Thus, the final shots of *On the Waterfront* may be read as a condemnation of capitalist exploitation. A detailed analysis of Kazan's other post-HUAC films reveal similar ambivalent themes and suggest that perhaps we should not unequivocally embrace Kazan's declaration of no 'regrets'." (Briley, 2016: xviii).

On the Waterfront would be a tough act to follow, but Elia Kazan knew exactly where to go next. Once again, he teamed up with John Steinbeck (1902-1968), with whom he had developed a close friendship while shooting *Viva Zapata*, and decided to adapt the book *East of Eden* (1955) to the big screen. Although he respected the author and was proud of their work together, Paul Osborne (1901-1988) was the one responsible for the screenplay, as Briley explains:

> (...) Kazan valued Steinbeck's loyalty, and despite some reservations regarding Viva Zapata!, the filmmaker had enjoyed his collaboration

> with the writer, and he approached Steinbeck about a film version of his epic novel *East of Eden* (1952). The novelist's last critically acclaimed book was *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and with *East of Eden* Steinbeck sought to reclaim his status as one of America's most predominant authors. *East of Eden* is a massive book that attempts to trace in fictional terms the origin of the Steinbeck family in Southern California and the Salinas Valley. While the novel earned mixed critical reactions, the readers loved the book, which emerged as a best seller. (Briley, 2016: 51-52)

At the time, Kazan joked that he would cast Marlon Brando again for the role of the troubled Cal Trask, but the age difference between the actor and the character made him change his mind. Curiously, Paul Newman was again considered for this role, and even went as far as to do a few wardrobe tests before another Actors Studio fellow landed the role: James Dean (1931-1955). Both Elia Kazan and John Steinbeck became convinced that he was Cal Trask, and no one else could take on that challenge but him.

The ten weeks of shooting were as intense as Kazan could make them, when he found out that Raymond Masey (1896-1983), who played Cal's father, despised James Dean as much as his character was supposed to despise his son. Once again, instead of easing the tension between the two colleagues, Kazan made it even worse, pulling Dean, a well-trained method actor, aside to instruct him on how to get the worse reactions out of Masey. The film is a brilliant portrait of Steinbeck's novel, but not everything we see is merely good acting, there are a lot of real feelings as well.

Kazan was more than a director, he took the risk of sometimes crossing the line with his actors' emotions, but all in the name of art. His films are moving, they are captivating, and all because they can relate to simple human nature, by portraying it exactly as it is. In this sense, in the next chapter I propose to do an in-depth analysis of the films *On the Waterfront* and *East of Eden* taking into account all these aspects discussed above. In these films we can observe how Marlon Brando and James Dean were shaped by different approaches of Kazan's method so as to become their characters.

Chapter 3

Brando vs Dean

It is almost impossible to address the "golden age" of the American cinema in the 1950s and not mention the names Marlon Brando and James Dean. These two actors were not only icons of their days, but they have also become a cinematic and social reference for the generations to come. Brando and Dean never got the opportunity to work together. Nonetheless, they are often either studied in comparison or in contrast with each other. In the countless pages that have been written about them, it is possible to find all types of accounts about their mutual dynamic: that James Dean aspired to become Marlon Brando; that the two were moved by a competitive nature towards one another; or even that they could not have been more different. It is, nonetheless, curious to think that they are even assessed in the same category, considering that James Dean only completed three films, compared to Marlon Brando's remarkable 39. Of these two actors Kenneth Kendall mentions that:

> James Dean was said to be another Marlon Brando, which isn't true at all. Marlon is heavy as led, compared to Jimmy. Jimmy is mercurial and light and dancing all over the place. That's not Marlon Brando at all. It was just that we had two good actors. We lost two actors in the crash in Cholame: James Dean and Marlon Brando. Because if James Dean had been alive, Marlon couldn't have let Jimmy walk the town away from him. We would have seen a lot more out of Brando than we have. But I think he sort of relaxed in his position. (Kendall *apud* Chekmayan, 1988)

The actor and artist believed, for instance, that the two could not have been more different. He worked as an extra in the film *Julius Caesar* (1953), alongside Marlon Brando, and it was after Brando's monologue as Mark Antony that he felt compelled to sculpt a bust of the actor while in character. His work attracted the attention of James Dean, who eventually saw the piece in New York, and decided to contact the artist to see if he would be interested in doing one of himself. Kendall at first was surprised with the request, because even though he knew who Dean was, he had never seen any of his films. At the time, he had just finished the sculpture of Brando, and was working on a sculpture of Steve Reeves (1926-2000), who was already a well-known Hollywood actor, so he was not sure if Dean would fit into the same category. A few weeks later he saw *East of Eden* (1955) and all of his doubts went away. Unfortunately, he only began to work on Dean's bust on September 30th, 1955, the day that the actor died at the premature age of 24 years old, so Dean was never able to see the end result.

As Kendall mentions, he believed that Marlon Brando's potential died on the

same day as James Dean's crash, since he no longer had a great rival to be compared to. It is possible to confirm through several accounts, some of them already shared on this study, that Brando had in fact a competitive nature, which Kazan often took advantage of in order to get the best performance out of him. One can also argue that his best and most memorable performances came before 1955, the year he refused to collaborate with Kazan again, but we cannot say for sure that it was Dean's absence that made Brando "relaxed on his position" (Kendall *apud* Chekmayan, 1988). Another factor that might have contributed to it could have been his inability to deal with fame and his desperate need for a private life away from the spotlight.

To better understand both men, as well as their personal and artistic struggles, it is important to know a little more about their personal lives. To some extent, it was their background that allowed them to become the characters that Kazan was looking to cast. For this study I will take into consideration the work of both actors before and under the direction of Elia Kazan in *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *East of Eden* (1995).

3.1) Marlon Brando

Marlon Brando Jr. was born on April 3rd, 1924, in Omaha, Nebraska, the third son of Marlon Brando Sr. (1895–1965) and Dorothy Brando (1897–1954). Brando Sr. worked as a travelling salesman, which often kept him away from his family. Having "inherited a violent temper and martinet ways from his father" (Bosworth, 2001: 1), Brando Sr. did not have the ability to be affectionate to his children, often being violent towards them and his wife. To make matters worse, he was a heavy drinker and engaged regularly in extra-marital affairs, something that deeply damaged his marriage. While Brando Sr. "was raising his kids by the 'Good Book', he was a relentless womanizer" (Bosworth, 2001: 6), and that was something that Brando could never accept, even recognizing that:

> He was a card-carrying prick whose mother deserted him when he was four years old – just disappeared, ran off some place – and he was shunted from one spinster aunt to another. I think he deeply resented women because of that experience. I loved and hated him at the same time. He was a frightening, silent, brooding, angry, hard drinking, rude man, a bully who loved to give orders and issue ultimatums – and he was just as tough as he talked. Perhaps that's why I've had a lifelong aversion to authority. (Brando, 1994: 7)

It is curious to see how Brando believed that his father's character had been shaped by the absence of his mother and the inconsistent presence of the remaining women in his life. Perhaps because he did not know love, Brando Sr. was not able to give love back to his children, something that deeply affected them. He often "varied between dark and uncommunicative periods and loud, unpredictable demands" (Kanfer, 2011: 6). By embodying everything that his son did not want to become, Brando traces his resentment towards figures of authority and his constant need to challenge them right back to his father. All the while, Brando could not help but to desperately seek for his father's approval or any sign of his affection. Unfortunately, Brando Sr. was not able to correspond to his son's expectations and often made him feel like he was not good enough:

> Most of my childhood memories of my father were of being ignored. I was his namesake, but nothing I did ever pleased or interested him. He enjoyed telling me I couldn't do anything right. He had the habit of telling me I would never amount to anything. He was far more emotionally destructive than he realized. I was never rewarded by him with a comment, a look or a hug. (Brando, 1994: 12)

Marlon Brando's mother Dorothy was the daughter of an independent and outspoken Irish mother, who raised her into a fascinating and unconventional woman for her time. Although Dorothy "truly loved her children, she was seldom home. Housework bored her, and she was hopelessly stagestruck" (Bosworth, 2001: 2). She worked as an actress and theatre administrator at the Omaha Community Playhouse, where she launched the career of Henry Fonda by giving him his first acting job, a gesture he never forgot. She loved poetry and music, and in a time when radio was still emerging, Dorothy relied on the piano lessons she had taken as a child and often gathered her three children around the piano to play them some tunes. Since this was one of the few activities the family enjoyed together, Brando learned all of the songs his mother played, as a way to please her. This is curious because "[h]e could never summon up the digits of his Social Security I.D., and there were times when he couldn't recall his own telephone number. But the music and the lyrics from those days around the keyboard never left him" (Kanfer, 2011: 6). So much so, that when he released his autobiography, at the age of 65, he called it *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (1995). Marlon described his mother as "a delicate, funny woman" (Brando, 1994: 9), while recognizing that she was not much more affectionate than his father. Unfortunately, Dorothy also shared her husband's alcohol addiction, which profoundly impacted her

children, but in particular her son:

> When my mother drank, her breath had a sweetness that I lack the vocabulary to describe. It was a strange marriage, the sweetness of her breath and my hatred of her drinking. She was always sipping surreptitiously from her bottle of Empirin, which she called "my change-of-life medicine". It was usually filled with gin. As I got older, occasionally I would find myself with a woman whose breath had that sweetness that still defies description. I was always sexually aroused by the smell. As much as I hated it, it had an undeniable allure for me.
>
> (Brando, 1994: 4)

Between the absence of Brando Sr. and Dorothy's devotion to the theatre, most of Brando's childhood memories were of the time he spent with the family nurse Ermeline. Ermi, as Brando fondly called her, was a woman of Danish and Indonesian descent, who had moved into the house at the age of 18 years old. At the time, Brando could not have been older than three or four years old, but he became immediately fascinated by her and her exotic beauty. Whether it was part of a fantasy he created around her image, or a truthful account of his childhood, Brando recalled that they were so close that they shared a bed, where they both slept naked (Brando, 1994: 11). He goes as far as to say that, because she was a heavy sleeper, at night he took advantage of their time together: "I sat there looking at her body and fondling her breasts, and rearranged myself on her and crawled over her. She was all mine; she belonged to me and me alone" (Brando, 1994: 11). Brando is a very complex individual, who claims to both feel aroused by the smell of alcohol he associated with his mother, and to have a sexual conscience and desire from the age of four. Nonetheless, there is no reason to believe that Ermi was aware of Brando's Platonical infatuation towards her, nor that she in any way reciprocated his advances.

When Marlon Brando was six years old, his father decided to move the family to Evanston, Illinois, where he was offered a better job. The move was devastating to Dorothy, who was forced to walk away from her acting career. Her drinking habit worsened, and she would sometimes wander around their house crying. At times "[s]he would say, 'I'm the greatest actress *not* on the American stage'" (Bosworth, 2012: 3). It was around this time that Ermi decided to get married, and promptly gave the family the notice that she was leaving. One day she simply told, to the then 7-year-old Brando, that she was going away on a trip, but that she would soon return. It took him several weeks to realize that she would not be coming back, and in fact he would not see her again for twenty years. Even as an adult he remembered how devastated he was with her

departure and considered it as “one of the informing incidents of his childhood” (Kanfer, 2011: 8). Ermi set the pattern for the relationships Brando would have throughout his life: “He would seek out a woman who would encourage him up to a point – and then abruptly and permanently exit” (Kanfer, 2011: 9):

> My mother had long ago deserted me for her bottle; now Ermi was gone too. That’s why in life I would always find women who were going to desert me; I had to repeat the process. From that day forward I became estranged from this world. (Brando, 1994: 12)

Later in life, with the help of his therapist, Brando came to “realize how his family had been an incubator of psychological violence, and that society had no way of controlling it or of stopping it because it was a private family matter, conducted behind closed doors” (Idem). He believed that he and his sisters, Jocelyn (1919–2005) and Frances (1922–1994), or Tiddy and Franny, how they were nicknamed, had “shared the same bunk in purgatory” (Brando, 1994: 26) while growing up. Franny would later describe her childhood and how impactful she believed it had been on her and her siblings: “I don’t remember forgiveness (…) No forgiveness! In our home there was blame, shame and punishment that very often had no relationship to the ‘crime’, and I think the sense of burning injustice it left with all of us marked us deeply” (Kanfer, 2011: 5).

Brando began to show his first signs of rebellion and struggle in school at a very young age. Although he would later attribute his struggles to dyslexia, he also noted that he was the only child at primary school who had already flunked a year at kindergarten (Brando, 1994: 12). With no responsible adults around, his sisters had to step in, the eldest having “to take him on a leash to kindergarten; otherwise he would have run away” (Bosworth, 2001: 3). Brando recognizes this particular time of his life when he mentions:

> I was failing in school, I was truant, I became a vandal and trashed houses that were being renovated; I shot birds, burned insects, slashed tires and stole money. At the same time I began finding myself not wanting to go home (…)
> I’ve often thought that I would have been much better off if I had grown up in an orphanage. My parents seldom fought in front of us, but there was a constant, grinding, unseen miasma of anger. After we moved to Evanston, the tension and unspoken hostility became more acute. Why, I don’t know, but I suspect my mother was growing more disillusioned and angry with my father’s philandering, and he was growing more unhappy with her drinking. (Brando, 1994: 14-16)

Then, one day, without any warning, Brando changed completely and "neighbours were astonished to see a spontaneous Tom Sawyer turnaround. Bud stopped shooting birds, admonished his friends not to step on ants, ostentatiously helped old people and drunks who had collapsed on the sidewalk" (Kanfer, 2011: 9). His sister Franny became witness to his good nature, describing him as "[s]weet, funny, idealistic and oh, so young" (Brando, 1994: 19). "He was "the 'star' of the neighbourhood, mimicking people, climbing in and out of windows (something he would do for much of his life) (…) He was 'a free spirit,' a friend remembers, 'a real individualist'. Even as a little kid you knew he was going to do anything he set out to do" (Bosworth, 2001: 4). Brando went from being the bully, to protect everyone and everything around him that could be the object of bullying. It was something that naturally changed in him, as he recalls:

> Once Tiddy told me, "By the time you were seven or eight you were constantly bringing home starving animals, sick birds, people you thought were in some kind of distress, and if you had a choice, you'd pick the girl who was cross-eyed or the fattest one because nobody paid attention to her and you wanted her to feel good". I suppose it was true. I fashioned myself into the protector of weaker beings. I stopped shooting birds and became their guardians. I scolded friends who stepped on ants, telling them the ants had as much right to live as they did. (…) I realized later, that early on I felt an obligation to help people who were less fortunate than me, or didn't have friends.
>
> (Brando, 1994: 19-21)

In 1936, after years of infidelity and abuse, the Brandos' marriage finally collapsed. Dorothy decided to take her children to California and moved in with her mother and half-sister. Nevertheless, her decision would only last two years and, by 1938, the couple decided to reconcile, and the family moved to Libertyville in Illinois. Unfortunately, this fresh start did not mean that Dorothy was able to move past her old drinking habits. Sometimes she would have to be brought home from bars by her husband or bailed out of prison by her son. While the men of the family were looking for Dorothy, Jocelyn had to assume the responsibility of bringing up her siblings and stepping in for her mother. During these troubled times, Brando recalled a specific incident which took place when he was 14- years-old and his father had once again brought Dorothy back home severely inebriated:

> I heard her fall, then the sounds of slapping and hitting, and I ran upstairs. She was lying on the bed crying and he was standing over her. I became insane with rage and set my teeth in an attack mode;

> filled with Goliath strength, through a clenched mouth nine inches away from his nose, I said in a low, clear voice, "If you ever hit her again, I'll kill you."
> He looked in my eyes and froze. He knew he was staring at more adrenaline than he had ever seen in his life. (…) He just got out of the room, leaving my mother on the bed. (Brando, 1994: 27)

His mother could not adjust to life in the country, where she felt isolated. She continued to hate housework and did not invest a lot of her in it. Even though her children did their best to help, they also had school to attend to, and the house would often be dirty and messy. In High School, Brando's strongest subjects were Sports and Drama, but in all other classes he continued to get poor grades. He constantly ran into problems with authority, and was often called into the principal's office. Although he was very popular among his friends, he noted that he was "anathema to many of my teachers and the parents of many of my friends, some of whom treated me as if I were poison" (Brando, 1994: 32). Many times, when his sisters were out with friends, and his father was away at work, Brando turned to the animals at their farmhouse as his only unconditional source of affection.

When Brando did not pass his sophomore year, his father decided to take severe measures and send him to Shattuck Military Academy, in Faribault, Minnesota, where he had been an honor student. There was nothing that Brando could do about his father's decision, not even try to remind him that "often instead of attending classes he went to Chicago to hunt for his mother, whom he usually found slumped in some bar passed out in her own vomit" (Bosworth, 2012: 8). The experience at Shattuck was a cruel punishment for Brando who not only was unable to live up to his father's good record at the institution, but also struggled to adapt to the strict regime. He often played pranks on his colleagues and teachers, and rebelled against the discipline of the military uniform. As he recalled "I had a great deal of satisfaction challenging authority successfully. I had no sense of emotional security. I didn't know later why I felt valueless or that I responded to worthlessness with hostility." (Bosworth, 2001: 9).

Every week he wrote to his parents in an attempt to redeem himself, telling them how much he loved them. Nevertheless, they never bothered to write him back or even pay a visit in the two years he spent at the Academy. He continued to be a poor student and mostly enjoyed the times he got a few parts in the school plays, where he was praised by his performances. In 1943, after being put on probation for being insubordinate to an officer, Brando violated his orders for not leaving the campus, and

was ultimately expelled. Once the student body discovered the decision of the faculty, they decided to go on strike until it was overruled. He was deeply touched with the response of his colleagues to what had happened to him. Still, when the principal wrote to him, inviting him to go back to Shattuck, he declined.

By the time he went back home, Frances and Jocelyn had moved to New York where they both studied Arts. Brando decided to join them, and perhaps even try acting like his sister Jocelyn, who by then had already appeared in plays in Libertyville and the Lake Zurich Playhouse. His father's reaction to his intentions was very similar to that of Elia Kazan's father when he heard that his son wanted to pursuit an acting career: "'The theater? That's for faggots! It's not man's work.' Then he added that Brando could never be a success anyway: 'Take a look in the mirror and tell me if anyone would want to see a yokel like you on the stage!'" (Bosworth, 2001: 12). However, regardless of the way they felt, his parents decided to financially support their son's move to the city of New York, as well as his enrolment in an acting school.

In 1943, at the age of 19, Brando made his move to New York, where he initially stayed with his sister Franny at her apartment in Greenwich Village. After a short while he moved out of her house, and moved in with her neighbor, Celia Webb, who was 10 years his senior. According to the people who know him best, "Brando preferred older women. 'He was looking for a substitute mother'" (Janice Mars *apud* Bosworth, 2001: 35). Webb would be the first among an endless list of lovers who became recurrent in his life, even after he moved on to another relationship. Like many of the women in his life, she looked back at Brando as "my addiction" (Mizruchi, 2014: 32), and remained close to him until the end of her life.

When he later looked back at this period of his life, he would say: "I arrived in New York with holes in my socks and holes in my mind" (*Listen to me Marlon*, 2015). Before he landed his first roles in the theatre, Brando found ways to pay the bills working as an elevator boy, a waiter and even a cook. At the same time, he frequented acting, dance and yoga classes at the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research, one of the most influential acting schools of the time. As someone who was "so powerfully physical" (Mizruchi, 2014:32), even after he left the classes, his love for acting remained with him, as Bosworth acknowledges:

> After work he'd regale his sisters with silent portraits of the people he'd been observing on the subway: the gum-chewing secretary adjusting her stockings, the one-legged derelict begging for pennies outside Carnegie Hall. Brando could transform himself into anybody

> instantly, and the transformation was completely organic. “If he played an electrician you could see the wires,” someone said. (2001: 15)

Before the Actors Studio was founded, the actors who wanted to practice Stanislavski’s System went to the New School, where they worked with renowned teachers like Erwin Piscator and Stella Adler. Brando became particularly fascinated with Adler, since she “exuded a glamour and a kind of radiant intelligence [he] had never seen before.” (Bosworth, 2001: 16). When the Group Theatre dissolved and their main actors and teachers went their separate ways, multiple approaches to the System were born. While Lee Strasberg, who would later become main teacher at the Actors Studio and set the grounds for the Method, based his approach on affective memory, Stella Adler followed Stanislavski’s revision of the System, in which the key element was imagination and physical action. Adler focused on the mindset and attention to detail of the actors, who should be given sets and wardrobes to match their characters reality and time period. She was keen on searching for hidden layers of content in the scripts that would amount to a broader characterization of each role, as Mizruchi describes:

> Since emotional intensity would be Brando’s stock-in-trade as an actor, he was lucky that Adler was teaching the class in which he enrolled at the New School. By avoiding personalization, and emphasizing script analysis, historical research, and action, Adler saved Brando from excavating his past. A childhood of neglect and loneliness provided plenty of Sturm and Drang, but he might have been unable to handle his emotions had he been pushed to re-enact them while a vulnerable student. What Brando *did* have was imagination, loads of it, and what Adler called “a sense of truth.” That sense of truth afforded a deep and subtle understanding of how emotions were expressed. (2014: 44-45)

By 1944, Brando’s parents’ marriage hit a new low point, and Dorothy sought refuge in New York next to her children. She rented an apartment on West End Avenue where all three Brando siblings moved in so that they could be close to their mother. Nevertheless, the move did not bring her or anyone around her any peace of mind. Instead, she went back to her old drinking habits, with her children sometimes rummaging through Manhattan looking for her. In less than one year, Dorothy was back in the Midwest, living with Marlon Sr., but by the time she left, her son Marlon had reached a severe state of depression, as indicated by Kanfer:

> "The young Brando," observes psychiatrist Gary Lefer, "saw brutality in his father and self-abuse in his mother. It was constant, but always kept within the walls of the house. Children of such parents live two lives: the false, well-kempt one presented to the world at large, and the real and messy one that they know at home. They think that they've put one over on their classmates, and thus know themselves to be phony. They grow up thinking that everything is bogus. Especially their own achievements. (2011: xii)

Stella Adler and her family were the ones to comfort Brando during this troubling time. She and Marlon developed a very close relationship, flirtatious to some extent, but above all he considered that: "Stella gave me emotional strength at a time when I needed it, (…) [w]hen I was suffering, disjointed and disoriented… she gave me not only her skill and talent as a teacher, but her home, her family, the largess of her personality, and her love" (Bosworth, 2012: 25). She played a key role in Brando's life, and he goes as far as to credit her and her family for saving his "sanity" (Brando, 1994: 98). He moved in with the Adler family for a while, and even dated Stella's daughter Ellen. For a person who felt like he had not yet accomplished anything in life in which he was good at, to have someone like Stella praise him for his acting was all the positive reinforcement that he needed. As Brando recalls: "She put her hands on my shoulders and said: 'Don't worry my boy: I've seen you, and the world is going to hear from you.'" (*Listen to me Marlon*, 2015)

In 1944, Brando landed his first big role on Broadway in John Van Druten's play *I Remember Mama*, produced by Rodgers and Hammerstein. His breakout performance would only come two years later, in 1946, with *Truckline Café* directed by Harold Clurman, and produced by Elia Kazan. Clurman, who was Stella Adler's husband by then, was not convinced that he should hire his wife's pupil to play a leading role on the play, even after seeing his role of Nels on *I Remember Mama*. He believed that the character of Sage McRae on *Truckline Café* was so different from his past record that the actor might not have it in him. He had a strong opinion about Brando's posture and how his "disrespect was not a pose. He noted, '[There is] something in Marlon that *resents* acting, yet he cannot help but be an actor. He thinks acting 'sickly.' He'd rather do something for 'the world'" (Kanfer, 2011: xii). The play did not succeed on Broadway, and was shut down after only nine days, which was enough for Brando to win a Donaldson Award for Best Supporting Actor, and for Clurman to gain a lot of praise in the guidance he gave to Brando as a director. Unlike what Clurman initially

believed, Brando did in fact have the character within him, but he was unaware of how he could channel it, as Mizruchi recalls:

> There was no doubt of latent talent, and Clurman recalled Brando's work in the initial rehearsals as arresting. But the young actor seemed unwilling to unleash the deep well of feeling the director believed was there. (…) After Clurman tried everything, including affective-memory exercises that did not help, he followed his instincts. Dismissing the rest of the cast, he commanded Brando to shout his lines. Clurman made Brando do this several times, directing him to increase his volume each time. Brando began to get exhausted and then enraged. Finally, Clurman had Brando climb a stage rope while shouting his lines. When he came down, he looked mad enough to hit the director. But something had happened to Brando; in the remaining rehearsals, Brando reached ever deeper into the part. Clurman would remember: "On opening night – and every night thereafter – his performance was greeted by one of the most thunderous ovations I have heard for an actor in the theatre. (2014: 51-52)

With time, and with the evolution of Brando's career, Clurman changed his opinion about the actor and his purpose behind it. He came to believe that "Marlon could so completely loose himself on a role, he was convinced that he could feel the wounds of a disenfranchised black, an oppressed Native American, a vagrant, a bewildered homosexual, a palooka" (Kanfer, 2011: xii). Elia Kazan was not indifferent to Brando's potential either; when he had the opportunity to direct Tennessee William's acclaimed play *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway in 1947, he knew who he wanted to cast as the controversial Stanley Kowalski. Brando had as competition for the lead role actors John Garfield (1913-1952) and Burt Lancaster (1913-1994), but the director had the final word. As the author Patricia Bosworth describes it: "Part of Kazan's genius as director was that he always matched the character of the play with the emotional core of the actor" (2001: 41). He saw in Brando the characteristics of Stanley Kowalski: "[…] the sexual magnetism, the brooding self-involvement, the little-boy quality. He was both brute and infant, and he had a strange tenderness, as well as a bizarre sense of humour that Kazan hoped to tap" (Bosworth, 2001: 41). Because as a director Kazan was not particularly fond of auditions, Brando did not even have to go through that process; he simply had a conversation with Kazan at his office. Being casted as Kowalski was one of the biggest milestones of Brando's career, as Hirsch points out:

> On stage in 1947, Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, mumbling and detonating, his back often turned

> audaciously to the audience, revolutionized American acting. And yet, like most revolutions, this one, too, had a lengthy pregnancy. Preceding Brando's explosion in Streetcar is an entire era in American theatre history – the story of the Group Theatre in the thirties – and preceding the Group is the history of the theatrical company that inspired it, the world's first theatre, The Moscow Art Theatre of Constantin Stanislavski. Brando's Kowalski, a landmark American performance in a landmark American play had its true artistic origins halfway around the world in the turn-of-the-century Russia; and the fresh, vital film acting of Brando and Dean in the early and mid-fifties represented in some ways a completion of an American theatrical experiment of the thirties and an ideal of truth in acting, first codified by Stanislavski, the most searching, dedicated, and powerful teacher of acting in the history of art. (1984: 10)

Although several authors have set parallels to the character of Stanley Kowalski and the personality of Marlon Brando, including Kazan himself, the actor did not agree with the comparison. In fact, he considered himself to be quite the opposite: "I was sensitive by nature and he was coarse, a man with unerring animal instincts and intuition" (Brando, 1994: 27). In spite of the fact that Brando admits that later in his career he had to do a lot of research for each of his roles, he did none for a *Streetcar Named Desire*, claiming that his interpretation of Kowalski "was a compendium of my imagination, based on the lines of the play. I created him from Tennessee's words" (Brando, 1994: 27), just as Stella Adler had trained him to do. Tennessee Williams was very pleased with the casting of Brando, considering that having an actor younger than expected playing Kowalski "humanizes the character" (Williams *apud* Mizruchi, 2014: 74). It is also important to underline that Brando's contribution to the role was deeper internally than it was externally. He was able to lend the part a sensitivity that made an otherwise visceral character appealing to theatregoers, even while the actor "in particular, identified with Blanche's pain and abhorred Stanley's violence" (Mizruchi, 2014: 74).

The play was such a success that in 1949 it premiered in London with Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois, and her husband, Sir Lawrence Olivier, as a director, in which we can imagine to have been a much different approach to Williams' work. In that same year, it was reported that Paramount was interested in getting the rights to the play, with the purpose of producing a film starring Bette Davis (1908-1989) as Blanche DuBois. Nonetheless, it was Warner Bros. who made the first move and got the rights to *Streetcar*. The studio had one demand about Kazan's original Broadway casting: the

replacement of Jessica Tandy in the role of Blanche for an actress who was better-known to the audience. Vivien Leigh appeared to be the obvious choice, especially because she was already familiar with the character and the studio trusted that she would be good for the box-offices.

In 1951, the film version of a *Streetcar Named Desire* was released, "which Brando (and Williams) preferred to the Broadway adaptation" (Mizruchi, 2014: 75) mostly because of the way they felt the camera was able to capture the character's emotions through lighting and close-ups. Still there are critics who argue that Brando's performance on Broadway was far superior, "believing the immediacy of what he accomplished there in the flesh, night after night, to be superior to whatever could be done on film" (Mizruchi, 2014: 76). Nevertheless, the film version earned twelve Oscar nominations, and four wins: Best Actress in a Leading Role for Vivien Leigh; Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Karl Malden; Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Kim Hunter; and Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Black-and-White for Richard Day George James Hopkins. Neither Kazan nor Brando won anything, despite being nominated as Best Director and Best Actor in a Leading Role respectively.

3.2) *On the Waterfront*

Back in 1949, screenwriter Budd Schulberg (1914-2009) acquired the rights to a series published in the *New York Sun* by Malcolm Johnson (1904-1976) called *Crimes on the Waterfront*. While he started working on an adaptation of this piece, Elia Kazan and Arthur Miller began writing their own version of *On the Waterfront*, which they originally called *The Hook*, for Columbia Pictures. Schulberg hit a dead end when he could not get financing for his project, and Kazan was left stranded by Miller after testifying before the HUAC.

By 1952, Schulberg, who had also been a friendly witness and named names before the HUAC, saw that the best opportunity to bring his work to the big screen would be to join forces with Elia Kazan, as Kanfer explains, when mentioning that both men "[…] saw a way to dramatize life on the docks – and not coincidentally, to show that under certain circumstances informing was morally justifiable" (2011: 123). Unlike what they originally thought, the Studios were not as excited as they were about the project, and one by one, Warner Bros, Paramount and MGM began to turn them down.

Amidst a "red witch hunt", in which the industry had to deal with a blacklist of writers, directors, producers and actors, the studios were quick to distance themselves of anything that would associate them with that controversy. In an incredible strike of luck, Kazan had the opportunity to make a last pitch of their idea to producer Sam Spiegel (1901 – 1985), who agreed to find private financing for the film and sell the distribution rights to Columbia Pictures.

As a Producer, one of Sam Spiegel's first requests was to have Marlon Brando for the lead role of Terry Malloy, a character that in many ways "was the flip side of Stanley Kowalski, still inarticulate, but now compassionate and perplexed, searching for affection rather than conquest, wanting to do right in an atmosphere of compromise" (Kanfer, 2011: 129). Considering Brando and Kazan's chemistry in the past, this did not seem to be a difficult request, but the actor remained conflicted with the director's testimony to the HUAC. In the impossibility to get Brando, the script was sent to Montgomery Clift (1920-1966), Paul Newman (1925-2008) and Frank Sinatra (1915-1998). Kazan ended up settling for Sinatra, because in his opinion: "Frank had grown up in Hoboken, where I was going to shoot the film, and spoke perfect Hobokenese. He'd be simple to work with" (Kanfer, 2011: 124). Little did Kazan know that Spiegel would put his best persuasion techniques to work, and along with Brando's agent, Jay Kanter (b. 1926), began to pressure the actor arguing that: "[p]olitics has nothing to do with this – it's about your talent, it's about your career" (Fraser-Cavassoni, 2003: 155). Disregarding the fact that the part was already promised to Sinatra, and the resistance that Brando put up, a meeting was arranged between him and Kazan, as Bosworth recalls:

> That day Kazan told Brando that *On the Waterfront* (…) was about the necessity of speaking out in certain circumstances; that sometimes it is harmful to keep quiet; and that Terry, in testifying against the mobsters on the docks was doing a noble thing. He admitted there were some parallels to what he had done in front of the HUAC. He, Kazan, had informed to break open the secrecy of the Communist party. He had no regrets, and he was quite defiant. He insisted he had not done it for the money. (2001: 100)

It was then that Brando agreed to play the role of Terry Malloy, justifying his choice with the fact that "he related to 'a guy who was driven crazy by his inner conflicts' and also because 'Gadge is good for me [as an actor]'" (Bosworth, 2001: 99). By the 1950s, Brando had become the personification of the "macho outsider, the

American male who cares so deeply he must pretend not to care at all." (Bosworth, 2001: 33). And he was right about Kazan as well, as he was the director that could get the best out of him while still respecting his inputs and creative process:

> Kazan was Brando's ideal director, because he, like Stella Adler, sanctioned his instincts. "When you start giving too much direction to an actor like Brando, you are likely to throw him off the track he's instinctively found," Kazan commented. "Sometimes the best direction consists of reading an actor's face and, when you see the right thing there, simply nodding to him… Then wait for a miracle. With Marlon, it often happened." (Mizruchi, 2014: 71)

To truly get into the mind of his character, just as his teacher Stella Adler had taught him, Brando felt the need to spend as much time as he could before the shootings at the docks in Hoboken, to meet local workers and even lend a helping hand. In method acting, the proximity to the character's reality was the best way an actor had to find the truth within the context of the story, as Bosworth points out:

> "The real action for Terry is an inner one. The drama is internal," Kazan kept saying. "He tries to swagger and appear jaunty, but what betrays him are his eyes." The way Brando uses his eyes in *Waterfront* is the key to his characterization. When Terry realizes he's being used by the union bosses to set up the murder of a dockworker, you see him struggling to think for the first time. His sidelong glances and faraway looks signal character confusion as the thug-of-war inside himself between conscience and complacency develops into a full-scale battle. There is a double drama going on between what Terry says and what Terry feels and thinks, and Brando always shows us how the characters thinks without saying a word. You can see the thoughts passing across his face and eyes, and you can hear how "his insides jam up his voice… his furtive looks complement the fractured speech he develops." (2012: 103)

The rehearsals took place at the Actors Studio, since many of the actors that were casted were either trained at the Studio or Method Acting students. Among them were Karl Malden (1912-2009) who played Father Barry; Lee J. Cobb (1911-1976) who played Johnny Friendly; Rod Steiger (1928-2002) who played Charley Malloy; Rudy Bond (1912-1972) who played Moose; Nehemiah Persoff (b. 1919) who played a taxi driver; Martin Balsam (1919-1996) who played Gillette; and Eva Marie Saint (b. 1924) who played her debut role as Edie Doyle. Before Saint, who was casted last minute to play the love interest of Terry Malloy, the female lead role was offered to Elizabeth Montgomery (1933-1995), Joanne Woodward (b. 1930), Jennifer Jones (1919-2009) and

even Grace Kelly (1929-1982), however none of them seemed to convince Kazan. The director made his final decision when he saw Saint's reading with Brando, and found that the chemistry between the two was undeniable. The actress recalls the mixed emotions of the experience, and how from day one Brando seemed to disarm her, as Kanfer indicates:

> "We laughed and giggled," Saint remembered "and I ended up laughing and crying at the same time. Gadge could see that sparks were flying, that Marlon had his way and that I was very vulnerable to him." She sensed that what Brando did "was more than improvisation. It was that this young man had the power to see through you – you felt like glass. I stayed off balance for the whole shoot." (2011: 127)

At the time, Saint had some theatre experience, however, *On the Waterfront* was the first film of her career. To keep her from feeling nervous or scared, Brando was extremely protective and kind towards her. They took the subway to New Jersey together, they had lunch together, "and when she got cold, he would wrap her up in blankets and give her back rubs, but always in character as Terry. 'He was Terry' she said" (Bosworth, 2004: 104). In the film, Edie Doyle's father worked at the waterfront his whole life to save money to send his daughter to a Catholic school, where she would be protected from men like Terry Malloy. Instead, she is captivated by the mission of saving Terry's soul and leading him on a righteous path, helplessly falling in love with him in the process. Once again Kazan was able to find the perfect combination between actors, by matching their personalities with the ones of their characters. Saint was an extremely religious woman, who had recently married producer Jeffrey Hayden (1926-2016), with whom she had a relationship until death did them part, and Brando was the sex-symbol of a generation, capable of disrupting any woman. Nevertheless, if there was anything beyond Brando and Saint's on-screen chemistry, none of them seemed to have acted on it, as Kanfer demonstrates:

> Perhaps because Marlon was aware of his mother's precarious health, perhaps because of a self-protective diffidence, the star's relationship with Saint remained strictly professional. She was at the beginning of a long, happy marriage to theatrical producer Jeffrey Hayden, and if she was attracted to Marlon, and he to her, there was no offscreen liaison. "It was as if we were safe *for* each other," she remembered. Kazan used Saint's natural shyness to advantage; she had to play a romantic scene in a slip, and her discomfort before the cameras was noticeable. Kazan approached her and whispered one word in her ear: "Jeffrey" – his way of saying, "you're not going to bed with Terry Malloy; you're going to bed with your husband." In a moment the

> inhibitions were swept away, and she played the moment with a delicate fervor. (2011: 127)

Marlon Brando once compared Kazan to a Japanese masseuse, describing him as someone "who knew just where to touch to reach the vital nerve endings" (Mizruchi, 2014: 32), which comes to show how aware he was of the director's influence on him. To help the actor prepare for his role as Terry Malloy, and to capture the moves of a true boxer, Kazan hired prize fighter Roger Donoghue (1930-2006). Donoghue had killed another boxer in a fight, leading to his early retirement from the rings, something that he also had in common with the character of Malloy, who was forced to end his career prematurely. Him and Brando trained daily at "Stillman's Gym" and also at the Actors Studio, where the actor studied him carefully, adopting a lot of his mannerisms. While they were working together, Brando asked Donoghue: "'Could you have been a champion?' Roger thought about it. After a pause he said, 'I could have been a contender.' Budd put that phrase in a script." (Kanfer, 2011: 126):

> **Charlie:** Look, kid, I – how much you weigh, son? When you weighed one hundred and sixty-eight pounds you were beautiful. You coulda been another Billy Conn, and that skunk we got you for a manager, he brought you along too fast.
> **Terry:** It wasn't him, Charley, it was you. Remember that night in the Garden you came down to my dressing room and you said, "Kid, this ain't your night. We're going for the price on Wilson." You remember that? "This ain't your night"! My night! I coulda taken Wilson apart! So what happens? He gets the title shot outdoors on the ballpark and what do I get? A one-way ticket to Palooka-ville! You was my brother, Charley, you shoulda looked out for me a little bit. You shoulda taken care of me just a little bit so I wouldn't have to take them dives for the short-end money.
> **Charlie:** Oh I had some bets down for you. You saw some money.
> **Terry:** You don't understand. I coulda had class. **I coulda been a contender**. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am, let's face it. It was you, Charley. (*On the Waterfront*, 1955)

What is now recalled as the "Contender Scene", and has inspired several studies and documentaries, was born from Brando's pure improvisation. He knew what was important to capture, and had the director's guidelines. Nonetheless, looking at the additional footage of the film, it is possible to see that Brando diverges from the script in every take. This unarguably demanded an incredible flexibility from actor Rod Steiger, who played opposite Brando as Terry's older brother Charley. In the scene, Charley asks his brother to be compliant with his mobster friends once again, and we

learn that Terry's career ended due to a fight he was forced to lose so that Charley's boss, Johnny Friendly, could profit from the fight. Charley tried to reason with Terry, offering to compensate and financially secure him, but Terry declined.

As a final act of desperation, Charley points a gun at Terry. It is at this point that Brando's genius stepped in by refusing to react to his brother pulling out a gun. His reaction was not of shock or intimidation, instead he calmly pushed the gun away, in complete disbelieve that his brother would do any harm to him. Instead he shows himself heartbroken that his brother, to whom he looked up to all his life, would even try to end his life. Again, if it had not been for Charley, he could have had class, been somebody, a contender… Rod Steiger in character as Charley looks perplexed at Brando's reaction, and with no other alternative than to accept his fate, he falls back in to his seat looking hopeless. Charley understands that, by sparing Terry's life, he will have to take his place. Nevertheless, he gives the gun to his brother, lets him out, and asks the taxi driver to take him to the arranged location. In the end, and in a moment that could have been transformed into another gangster film scene, this passage becomes about brotherly love, contradicting the rules of the game, as Mizruchi comments:

> His genius was his ability to access so much of this variety, to locate *within himself* the makings for different roles. When he took the stage or entered a film set as Eugene Marchbanks or Terry Malloy, Brando knew his character from infancy to the grave. He knew how the man presented himself to the world, in repose and in anger; how he stood, lounged, walked; whether he touched others when he greeted or spoke to them; whether he arched his brows pompously or apologized for himself with perpetually downcast eyes. (…) The ways people revealed themselves in the smallest movements fascinated Brando. (2014: 70)

One of Brando's greatest characteristics is his ambivalence. He is rough on the outside, while at the same time longing for affection and acceptance on the inside. His scenes with Saint, in which he asks her to understand him are a true portrayal of his essence. He made audiences want to reach out to him, to help him, while at the same time they were conscious that he was not one of the good guys. The story itself is extremely moving, being about a boy that wishes to be redeemed, and finding the right girl for him that will lead him to that redemption. A man who has conscience and lives up to his ideas and values, and that was a theme that deeply resonated with both Brando and Kazan.

Another of the scenes that defined and immortalized the film, the glove scene, was also the product of a mere accident. Kazan has been humble enough to admit that the only credit he could take from this scene was the fact that he knew not to say cut when the actors started to derive from the original script. Saint accidentally drops her glove while talking to Brando, and he promptly picks it up, not returning it to the actress. Because no one told them to stop or start over, the actors continued to say their lines. From all of the takes, that was Kazan's choice, because in his opinion it was the one that felt more natural.

The scene is set in the most innocent place possible: a children's playground, and that is where they discover each other for the first time. Edie is in the bloom of her awakening sexuality, and she has been controlled all of her life, even repressed to some extent. In this particular scene she is seen fighting with her deepest impulses towards Terry. From Terry's point of view, the way he plays with Edie's glove can be seen as the first signs of tenderness and vulnerability from the character. Edie, being a catholic girl would not likely be seen on the street with a boy like Terry, but the fact that he now has her glove also has a way to make the scene look more credible.

It is curious to think that Brando, a man who sought his mother's acceptance his whole life, came to play a man who fought for atonement in order to become worthy of the woman he loves. Edie's character in *On the Waterfront* is the embodiment of the Virgin Mary, and the only one in the story that can give Terry back his peace and refuge. In his life, Brando never found the woman that would become his Edie and give him the stability he deeply needed. As for his mother's affection, he was never able to achieve it either. Dorothy died in 1954, during the filming of *On the Waterfront*. On most days, Brando left the set earlier than his peers to attend his therapist's appointments, in what is thought to be one of the most difficult periods of his life.

3.3) James Dean

Coincidently or not, another man who would grow-up to be deeply affected by the loss of his mother was James Byron Dean, born on February 8th 1931, in Marion, Indiana, to Mildred (1910-1940) and Winton Dean (1907-1995). The couple met right after Mildred graduated from High School and moved to Marion following the death of her mother to cancer. After dating for only one month, she became pregnant, and in an

attempt to avoid any scandal, on July 26th 1930, 22-year-old Winton married 19-year-old Mildred. Even though he was raised in a rural area, Winton was not very interested in farming or in the world beyond his community. He trained to be a dental technician, and when his son was born, he was working at the Marion's Veteran's Hospital, a position that gave his family an uncommon stability during the Depression years. Mildred was quite different from her husband as she "loved to learn, had a keen sense of humour, and was interested in art, music and poetry. She dreamed of travelling abroad" (Warrick, 2006: 11). Although they did not have much in common, it was the circumstances of their relationship that brought them together, as Warrick reveals:

> Mildred Dean spent her days getting ready for the birth of their baby. She redecorated their apartment, painting every room. Whenever possible, she also used money she saved to escape on little adventures. She would board on a bus for Indianapolis by herself. In the city, she went to variety shows and dance recitals. Sometimes she attended plays at the Indianapolis Civic Theater. To fill evenings at home, Mildred tried to entertain her husband by reciting poetry. Indiana poet James Whitcomb Riley was one of her favorites, but Winton showed no interest in her performances. (2006: 12-13)

As an only child, Dean developed a close and affectionate relationship with his mother, as "[s]he held and cuddled him constantly. Relatives scolded her for spoiling the boy" (Warrick, 2006: 13). She read to him her favorite authors, being one of them, as Dean's name shows, Lord Byron. Dean grew up sharing his mother's love for the arts, and she made sure to encourage him to pursue dancing and violin lessons. Her influence was very visible on her son, and perhaps that is why, as Dean's grandmother Emma Dean (1885-1961) recalls, as soon as the boy was old enough to stand on something, he began to perform (*Forever James Dean*, 1988). Dean himself believed that he was always inclined towards an acting career, as Dalton comments:

> It was an accident, although I've been involved in some kind of theatrical function or other since I was a child – in school, music, athletics. To me, acting is the most logical way for people's neuroses to manifest themselves, in this great need we all have to express ourselves. To my way of thinking, an actor's course is set even before he's out of the cradle. (1974: 175)

When Dean was three-years-old, Winton decided to experiment the farm life he had always tried to distance himself from, and quit his job to raise bullfrogs. The family moved to Fairmont, Indiana, where they lived briefly with Winton's sister Ortense (1901-1991) and her husband Marcus (1900-1976). During the Great Depression it was

not likely that Winton's project would be successful, so by 1935, when he was invited to work at Sawtelle Veteran's Hospital, he did not think twice before accepting it, and moved with his wife and their five-year-old son to Los Angeles. Being away from their family and the reality they had known until that point, made Mildred even closer to her son:

> Mildred Dean created a little theatre for Jimmy and herself, and on stages made of cardboard they invented plays, using dolls as actors. Through these afternoons in Santa Monica they materialized many a daydream, fugue-like figures working through tenses from past to past to future, replacing the world around them with one of their own devising. One of the most compelling stories about Jimmy's childhood is of the wishing game, a variant on that generous person the tooth fairy and a fantasy that was supposed to be his favorite. Before he went to sleep, Jimmy would put underneath his pillow a piece of paper with a wish written on it. Mildred would slip in while he was asleep, read the wish and, if possible, she would make it come true the next day. (Dalton, 1974: 4)

Mildred's influence was extremely meaningful in Dean's upbringing, awakening his senses to music, arts and creativity in general. She wanted to give her son all the opportunities she was not allowed to have while growing up, and she showed him the world had endless opportunities waiting for him. In 1939 their lives changed irreversibly when Mildred began to complain about severe pains in her chest. She was diagnosed with an advanced stage of breast cancer and, at that moment, her husband and son became helpless witnesses to the quick and sudden deterioration of her health. Her premature death left her nine-year-old son forever lost in the world, and her husband without any sense of direction, as Wrinkler mentions:

> Jim and I – well, we've never had that closeness. It's nobody's fault, really. Just the circumstances. (…)
> (…) Jim's mother came down with cancer. She was only twenty-nine. The doctors told me it was hopeless. I didn't know what to do. How do you tell an eight-year-old boy his mother's going to die? I tried. In my own stumbling way I tried to prepare Jim for it. Tried to tell him about the sorrow that was coming. Many times I tried to tell the boy what was coming. I just couldn't make it.
> Jim's mother passed away before she was thirty. I was broken up. So was the boy. I couldn't look after him and work, too, so I sent him back to Indiana to live with my sister and her husband. They raised Jim on their farm. And what a fine work they did. (2016: 33-34)

Dean never felt close to his father, who was a perfect symbol of patriarchal authority, and practically a stranger to him. Winton never shared any of the interests that

Mildred had cultivated in their son and did not know how to rapport with him. Even though Mildred had died of cancer, Dean held his father accountable for her illness, believing that it had developed from the misery that he had caused her during their married years. In the opinion of Leonard Rosenman (1924-2008), one of Dean's friends: "Jimmy's mother had been very encouraging, but she had married this rigid, stupid, dreadful man with an infantile jealousy of both his wife and his son – and of their closeness to one another" (Rosenman *apud* Winkler, 2016: 35).

After his forced separation from the mother he adored, Dean suffered a new trauma when his father decided that his only viable option was to send him to Fairmount, Indiana, to live with his aunt Ortense. According to Winton's own account: "I was deep in debt with doctor's bills, X-rays, radium treatments and everything else. I was alone without anyone to look after the boy when I was at work. I had to get my feet under me again" (Dalton, 1974: 6). Mildred's treatments had drained the family's finances to the point that Winton had to sell his car to pay for her last operation. Unfortunately, by the time Mildred passed away, her husband could not afford both his and their son's train ride to Indiana in order to attend the funeral. It was decided that the boy should be the one to make the journey, in his grandmother's company, as well as his mother's casket. Because his father had asked him to look after his mother, Dean made sure to run to the luggage carriage at every stop, to make sure that Mildred was still there.

Winton saw these changes in his life as an opportunity for a fresh start. He decided to move to Santa Monica, seldom visiting his son, or even his wife's grave. For Dean, who was left to cope with the loss of both parents, the case was very different. He felt orphaned at the age of nine, and of his circumstances he would once say: "My mother died on my when I was nine years old. What did she expect me to do? Do it all by myself?" (Dalton, 1974: 8).

After Dean's arrival to Fairmount, his aunt and uncle did the best they could to help him overcome the death of his mother and make him feel welcome into his new home. His aunt Ortense made sure to integrate him into the community, taking him with her to their local church and encouraging him to participate in some readings against the harms of alcohol. In a way, delivering these readings were the closest he could get to the poetry reciting he used to share with his mother. To better prepare for them, he requested the help of Adeline Nall (1906-1996), his drama teacher at Fairmount High School, who played a pivotal role in Dean's life as Dalton remarks: "[h]is mother had

wished him into being, the Winslows nurtured him and Mrs. Nall, like some helper from folklore, led him along his destined path" (1974: 36). She would be the first to introduce Dean to acting, casting him on several school plays and encouraging his passion for the trade. She remained one of Dean's biggest fans as supporters until the end of her life, as did his grandmother Emma, to whom there was no doubt as to what her grandson's true calling was going to be:

> It was becoming plain to all of us that acting was the thing Jimmy was best at. He won declamatory contests, even a state one, but the thing that convinced us he was an actor was his appearance in a church play, called "To Them That Sleep in Darkness." Jimmy played the blind boy. Well, I'll tell you, I wish he wasn't quite so good at it. I cried all the way through. (Winkler, 2016: 6-7).

Dean's uncle Marcus had a different way to encourage his nephew to pursue his own interests. In 1947, for his 16th birthday, he gave Dean his first motorcycle, a Czech model with the power of one horse and a half. Dean, who had grown up into a restless teenager, quickly became inseparable from his motorcycle, driving it all around the town. His need to live on the edge quickly earned him the nickname of "One-Speed Dean" (Warrick, 2006: 38) and made him loose his two front teeth. For the rest of his life he used a bridge his father made him to cover the loss of his teeth. His cousin Marcus believed that Dean's destiny could have been very different if he had fallen only once: "Trouble is, he never got hurt, and he never found anything he couldn't do well almost the first time he tried. Just one fall off the bike and maybe he'd have been afraid of speed. But he was without fear" (Dalton, 1974: 39).

At Fairmount High School Dean was a versatile A student who was part of the Advanced Speech and Drama clubs, as well as in the baseball and basketball teams. By 1948, when the school got a new principal, all the students were asked to write a short autobiography to present themselves. It is curious to see young James Dean's take on himself, in what is one of the few accounts of his life written by himself:

> Mom became ill and passed out of my life at the age of nine. I never knew the reason for Mom's death, in fact it still preys on my mind.
> I had always lived such a talented life. I studied violin, played in concerts, tap- danced on theatre stages but most of all I like art, to mold and create things with my hands.
> I came back to Indiana to live with my uncle. I lost the dancing and violin, but not the art. I think my life will be devoted to art and dramatics. And there are so many different fields of art it would be hard to foul up, and if I did, there are so many different things to do—farm, sports, science, geology, coaching, teaching music. I got it and I

> know if I better myself that there will be no match. (…)
> My hobby, or what I do in my spare time, is motorcycle. I know a lot about them mechanically and I love to ride. I have been in a few races and I have done well. I own a small cycle myself. (Winkler, 2016: 38-39).

It was not a surprise that, as soon as he graduated from High School in 1949, Dean decided to leave his roots behind and move to California to pursue an acting career. He attended Santa Monica City College from September 1949 to May 1950 and then enrolled in a Major of Theatre and Arts at the University of California, Los Angeles, from September 1950 to February 1951. It was while he was in California that he began to study Method acting under the instruction of actor James Whitmore (1921-2009). Before finding an apartment for himself, he stayed a while with his father who had by then remarried. Not much had changed from the time they had lived together, as they remained virtually strangers to each other. In Winton's opinion, the reason why they were so distant from each other was due to the fact that they "were separated for a long period of time, from when he was nine until he was eighteen. Those are the important, formative years when a boy and his father usually become close friends" (Wrinkler, 2016: 32). Additionally, Dean's passion for acting was also a factor that distanced the two, with Winton claiming: "My Jim is a tough boy to understand. At least, he is for me. But maybe that's because I don't understand actors, and he's always wanted to become one" (Wrinkler, 2016: 32). His father eventually became proud of his son's work, and thought he would go far, however he admitted that while they briefly lived together, he tried to talk him out of it, as described in Wrinkler:

> "He was always crazy about acting, and I remember saying to him a couple of times, 'Jim, acting is a good hobby but why don't you study something substantial? Why don't you become a lawyer? But no, it was acting for him all the way.
> "Nowadays, he lives in a world we don't understand too well – the actor's world. We don't see too much of him. But he's a good boy, my Jim. A good boy, and I'm very proud of him. Not easy to understand, no sir. He's not easy to understand. But he's all man, and he'll make his mark. Mind you, my boy will make his mark." (Wrinkler, 2016: 35)

Apart from the plays he participated back in Indiana, Dean's first professional job was a television appearance for a Pepsi commercial at the age of 17 years-old. Unlike what he had expected, his career did not take off after that, and he was only offered minor roles. It was not until 1951, when he was already 20 years-old, that he got

his first significant role as Apostle John in the television drama *Hill Number One: A Story of Faith and Inspiration* from the series *Family Theatre* (1949-1958). He only had a few lines on the film, but his short appearance moved a group of girls from a catholic High School to form the first James Dean Fan Club. A few other television appearances followed, nevertheless his growing frustration about the development of his Hollywood career, led him to move to New York City by the end of the same year.

Not too many years had passed since the end of World War II, and many of the traditions and values which were pillars to the previous generations of American youth were now beginning to crumble. New York City, in particular, was full of people trying to find themselves as well as their purpose in life. Dean was one of them. During his time in New York he struggled to understand who he was in his passage from his childhood to his adulthood. It is very fitting that his favorite book was *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It tells the story of a little prince who leaves the safety of his planet, falling into the complex world of grown-ups. Through his eyes he is able to give us the perspective of a child, who notices the beauty in things that adults are no longer capable of seeing. Arlene Sax (1936-2014), a fellow actress and friend, also denotes the similarities between Dean and the Little Prince:

> He read me *The Little Prince*, that was his favorite book, because it was about him. (It) Told about a little boy that came from a star where he planted a rose. The boy loved to look at the stars because he had faith that in one of them was a single rose hoping he'd come home; then the little boy died. (Arlene Sax *apud* Altman, 1957)

The open end of the book allows its readers to decide whether the boy died or returned to his planet, where he reunited with his beloved rose. One can only hope that after Dean's premature passing, he was reunited with his mother, whom he missed terribly all his life. In her absence, he continued to be motivated in becoming someone she would be proud of. He continued to read, began to sculpt and took on the hobby of photography as a creative outlet for self-expression. His passion for speed remained a big part of his life, but it changed from motorbikes to fast cars, as he began to participate in amateur races. No matter what his hobbies were, there was one thing he was determined above anything else, and that was that he should become an actor; he never considered other things.

In order to pay his bills while he lived in New York, Dean took jobs working as an usher at the cinema, and backstage at an entertainment show called *Beat the Clock*

(1950-1961). All of his free time was spent at movie screenings, sometimes watching several movies in a row. Dean became hopelessly fascinated by the icons of his days, being one of them Marlon Brando. Dean intended to become a serious actor, and to him that meant to proceed with his studies in Method Acting and enrolling in the Actors Studio. After several auditions, at the age of 21-years-old he became one of the youngest members of the Studio. When he finally achieved his goal, it was such a remarkable event for him that he decided to share the good news with his aunt and uncle in a letter:

> I have made great strides in my craft. After months of auditioning, I am very proud to announce that I am a member of the Actors Studio. The greatest school of the theater. It houses great people like Marlon Brando, Julie Harris, Arthur Kennedy, Mildred Dunnock…Very few get into it, and it is absolutely free. It is the best thing that can happen to an actor. I am one of the youngest to belong. If I can keep this up and nothing interferes with my progress, one of these days, I might be able to contribute something to the world... (Howlett, 2016: 33)

It is curious to see how abruptly his fascination with the studio rapidly turned into repulse for the institution. One day, after an exercise in class, Lee Strasberg tore Dean's performance apart, criticizing him in front of his colleagues, so that they could learn from his mistakes. Dean did not take it well, so "when Strasberg criticised a scene he did, he walked out of the Actors Studio and never performed there again" (*The James Dean Story*, 1957). Later the renowned teacher would describe him as "a natural actor, but very shy; sensitive about people getting too close to him." (*The James Dean Story*, 1957). Nonetheless, at the time Dean felt that his talent was not being recognized. William Bast, one of Dean's friends, described his outburst after the incident:

> Jimmy said that Strasberg was a "very ugly man" who kept no mirrors in this house for fear of chancing unexpectedly upon his own reflection. Neither Montgomery Clift nor Brando was affiliated with the Studio, and Jimmy felt that it was unnecessary for a talent such as his own to be criticized by the "ugly man" who had a "personal vindictiveness" toward Jimmy while favoring others who kowtowed to Strasberg's opinions or who fucked or sucked the members of the board. Jimmy said that Strasberg's ideas were "nothing more than personal opinions," and paraphrasing Nietzsche, Jimmy said, "It wasn't that they were true, only that they were held as being true." The instructor's opinions, Jimmy said, "mostly hot air and hog shit." He mimicked Strasberg's self-importance; even the roundness of the man's bald head seemed to glint from Jimmy's impersonations. The voice was Strasberg's, mouthing silly, non-sensical statements or stodgy platitudes. "He sits there in this posture, this ugly man who is married to an ugly woman," Jimmy said, "and farts out these opinions

while half of the people in the place run around goosing each other."
(William Bast *apud* Winkler, 2016: 79)

Working according to affective memory, Strasberg's preferred technique in Method Acting was always a personal, and to some extent damaging, experience. There is no reason to believe that the teacher was in anyway incorrect with Dean when giving him his feedback, but one can imagine how vulnerable he must have felt after being exposed like that. This incident, nonetheless, did not keep him off his goal. Determined to stand out as an emerging actor, he began to transform his image, and from his promotional photos between 1951 and 1953 it is possible to see that he moves away from his nice country boy image he promoted back in Los Angeles, to a more mature, intense and focused version of himself. There was an evolution in him as a person, which also translated into his acting career. In a way he continued to be as lost and in need of love and approval as he had been all his life. His Actors Studio colleague Shelly Winters (1920-2006) remembers one of her first impressions of Dean:

> His existence seemed so pointless and haphazard, and no matter how I questioned him, I couldn't get a straight answer. He was obviously very beautiful and a gifted actor, but he didn't seem to want anything. In some weird way he reminded me of Peter Pan, but without the joy, as if he had sprung from never-never land and would disappear back into it. (Shelly Winters *apud* Riese, 1991: 120)

In 1952, Dean made his Broadway debut when he was casted as Wally Wilkins on the play *See the Jaguar* (1952), by N. Richard Nash. His role was of a vulnerable teenage boy who had been kept in a cage all his life by his demented mother. The critics praised Dean's performance, but the production was prematurely shut down after only five performances. After *Jaguar*, Dean was once again casted in over a dozen TV dramas, none of them being very successful.

His breakout performance would only come in 1954, when he landed the role of Bachir on the Broadway play *The Immoralist* (1902) by André Gide. The play is the first-person narrative story of Michel, who after becoming ill tries to redefine his own identity and sexuality. During his honeymoon with wife Marcelline, Michel meets a beautiful and captivating Arabic boy named Bachir, with whom he engages in a relationship. By giving in to his deepest desires, the character is able to complete his search, while at the same time reflecting the burdens that comes with it. The production starred Louis Jourdan (1921-2015) as Michel, and Actors Studio's actress Geraldine

Page (1924-1987) as Marcelline. While he was getting ready for his part, Dean discovered that his former teacher Adeline Nall was in New York for a short visit, and made sure to invite her for the rehearsals. Nall, who attended to Dean's request, proudly recalled how the playwrights described her beloved pupil:

> Late in the afternoon, Ruth Goetz sat down behind me. "I think your student has the soul of a true artist," she reflected. "When we first started rehearsing, I thought he was the most undisciplined boy I had ever seen. He seemed to be absolutely uncontrolled. But as I watched him develop in his role, I realized this young man is one of the most disciplined actors I have ever seen." (Wrinkler, 2016: 51)

With time, the rehearsals became a bit tense, when Jourdan and Dean began to antagonize each other, addressing one another only when they were on stage. Still, word got out about the actor who was to play Bachir, and screenwriter Paul Osborn (1901-1988), who was working with Elia Kazan on the film adaptation of John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden* (1952), asked the director to consider him for the part of Cal Trask. Kazan later described his first impressions of the actor in his autobiography:

> Paul Osborn, who was writing the screenplay, said I should have a look at the young man playing the bit part of an Arab in a play [*The Immoralist*] at the John Golden Theatre. I wasn't impressed with James Dean – I'd begun to think about Brando again – but to please Osborn I called Jimmy into the Warners' New York offices, for a closer look. When I walked in he was slouched at the end of a leather sofa in the waiting room, a heap of twisted legs and denim rags, looking resentful for no particular reason. I didn't like the expression on his face, so I kept him waiting. I also wanted to see how he'd react to that. It seemed that I'd outthought him, because when I called him into my office, he'd dropped the belligerent pose. We tried to talk, but conversation was not his gift, so we sat looking at each other. He asked me if I wanted to ride on the back of his motorbike; I didn't enjoy the ride. He was showing off – a country boy not impressed with big-city traffic. When I got back to the office, I called Paul, and told him this kid actually was Cal in *East of Eden*; no sense looking further or "reading" him. I sent Dean to see Steinbeck, who was living near me, on Seventy-second Street. John though Dean a snotty kid. I said that was irrelevant; wasn't he Cal? John said he sure as hell was, and that was it. (1988: 653-654)

Because this was to be Dean's first film, Kazan decided to take him to California for some screen tests before signing him in. The two flew together from New York, and enjoyed all the luxury accommodations the director was more than used to. For Dean, who carried his personal belongings in paper bags, that was the first time he had ever

been on an airplane. Nonetheless, he had a request the director did not expect:

> When Jimmy asked if we could pause on the way into town at the place where his father, a sort of lab technician, worked, I was delighted. Dean dashed into one of those very temporary-looking buildings that flank highways there, and came out with a man he said was his father. The man had no definition and made no impression except that he had no definition. Obviously there was a strong tension between the two, and it was not friendly. I sensed the father disliked his son. They stood side by side, but talk soon collapsed, and we drove on.
> I believe the encounter shocked Dean. I saw that the story of the movie was his story – just as it was, in a way, my own. My father used to complain to his assistant at George Kazan, Oriental Rugs and Carpets, about me. "That boy never be man" he'd say. "What am I going to do with him?" Jimmy's father didn't seem to think his son's future very promising either. (Kazan, 1988: 654)

It almost seems that Dean's request for this last stop on their way to the Warner Brothers Studios was his final attempt to get his father's recognition, and to show him that the career he had chosen, and so avidly pursued, was finally going to take off. He was about to star in a film directed by renowned director Elia Kazan, who was an icon to him ever since he had started studying Method Acting.

Dean rarely visited his father and stepmother, even when they all lived in California close by each other, so this had to be more than a simple visit. Winton was, as always, showing his indifference towards his son's achievements, and that was very striking to Kazan. By meeting Winton Dean, the director had the opportunity to take a deeper look into Dean's personal life and the struggle he had endured. In the words of Steinbeck himself:

> The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt—and there is the story of mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputated, the human would not be what he is. (Steinbeck, 2002: 271)

Kazan was convinced, and Steinbeck was as well, that they wanted Dean in *East of Eden*. His tragic story was the story of Cal Trask, up to the damaged relationship with his estranged father. Dean, who had had enough with his feuds with Jourdan, gave his notice on the opening night of *The Immoralist* in New York. This meant that he had to do the play for two weeks, and then he was ready for his commitment with Kazan.

3.4) *East of Eden*

In 1954, when Kazan began to look for a young actor for the role of Cal for *East of Eden* (1952), his first instinct had been to cast Marlon Brando again, and to get Montgomery Clift to play his older brother Aron. At the time, Clift was too old to play the part, and Brando remained conflicted with Kazan's testimony before the HUAC, refusing any kind of further collaborations. It is understandable that, at one point, Kazan associated the role of Cal to Marlon Brando, because once again he was before a character who was deeply shaped by the troubled relationship he had had with his father and the desperate need for his approval. He could of course find in Brando a dimension of his personal struggle that he had not explored yet, but Cal required someone more vulnerable and with a different sense of insecurity than Brando could have given to the role. Even when he was required to show diffidence, Brando could never strip from his rough nature the way that Dean could. The two had very different postures, and for Cal, Kazan made the right choice in pursuing Dean. On the notes he wrote while developing the character, Kazan commented that: "Everything this kid does should be delightfully anarchistic, odd, original and imaginatively eccentric and full of longing. He is the unexpected personified. He goes directly to the heart of the matter" (*James Dean: Sense Memory*, 2005), and that was the definition of James Dean, as explained in the documentary *James Dean: Sense Memory:*

> Kazan on Dean: There he was, and I had an intuition, I said: this is Cal, this is the guy right here. He did a thing that always attracts me, he wasn't polite to me and that always sort of makes me feel he's not trying to butter, you know… to butter me up right like that. He has a real sense of himself. He said: I will take you for a ride on my motorbike. It was very hard for him to talk and riding me on the back of his motorbike, which I did like on the streets of New York was his way of communicating with me, of saying: well I hope you like me or look at my skills or whatever. So then… so he had his own… you saw what he was like… he had his own way… I thought he was perfect for the part. I mean, I thought he was an extreme grotesque of a boy, I thought he was a twisted boy, I thought he was twisted by the denial of love. And it turned out, as I got to know his father, I got to know about his family, that had been in fact twisted by the denial of love. (Elia Kazan *apud James Dean: Sense Memory*, 2005)

Dean was as much eager as he was willing to work and be shaped by the director. Indeed, he remained haunted by the absence of his father, as if he was an orphan, and the death of his mother at the age of nine. The absence of the two had left

him with a hole in his personality while growing up. Kazan understood that and, as the great master manipulator that he was, he found a way to enhance it while shooting. He gave Dean all the positive reinforcement he could, he nurtured him, and gave him as much privilege on set as possible, in a way filling in for that father figure that Dean so desperately longed for:

> I think, well, you see … my understanding of Jimmy was he was so desperate for familial love. He needed a father very badly and attached him- self to many men as father figures, [Elia] Kazan and George Stevens, even George Stevens, who was a bad father to him. But there were others, Nick Ray became a father to him, and he needed that desperately.
> —James Dean's friend, actor and director Mark Rydell on *Larry King Live*, December 3, 2005

The film begins with Dean, as Cal, following a lady on the street, whose wardrobe clashed with the rural background around her. Her identity is not known to the viewer at this point, however we later come to realize that we are before Kate, played by actress Jo Van Fleet (1915-1996), who is Cal's estranged mother. Kate left her family without a notice, and several accounts of her departure have been told to her children. Now that her son has located her, he demands to have a bit of her time. In a heart-breaking scene, when Cal is finally able to reach her, she demands that her bodyguards take him away. While fighting them away, he simply cries out: "I want to talk to you! Please, talk to me! Talk to me, please! Mother!" (*East of Eden*, 1955). Dombrowski perfectly described the scene as follows:

> When Cal (James Dean) is violently dragged from his mother's presence down a dark, narrow hallway in her whorehouse, screaming his protest and screaming while he grasps a rail so tightly that the pimp pulling him tears off half of his sweater, the important thing is not that we are witnessing a symbolic birth trauma, but that Kazan is doing everything he can to make us believe that we are experiencing a real one. (Dombrowski, 2011: 30)

In fact, it is almost as if we are witnessing a real trauma, if we remember that Dean too has lost his mother. The circumstances are inarguably different; nevertheless, we can establish a parallel in the sense that they were removed from their children's lives abruptly and have never returned. Dean's screams are a desperate call for a few more minutes with the mother he was stolen from. Unfortunately, even though Kate is in fact Cal's mother, she is no longer the woman he used to know.

Choosing an actress to play the character of Abra proved to be difficult for

Kazan. The director had set his mind on Julie Harris (1925-2013), who had been one of the first members of the Actors Studio. She was 28-years-old, when Dean was only 23-years-old at the time. After screen and wardrobe tests, Kazan was able to determine that the age difference was not too noticeable, but Jack Warner commented that he wished that the director had "taken a 'prettier' girl" (Levene, 1994: 68). On a letter to John Steinbeck, Kazan stood by his decision to cast Harris:

> [Sandy Hook, Connecticut]
> [March 1954]
> Dear John:
> (…)
> I had an awful time with the girl. Terrible. The young girls are worse than the young boys. My god, they are nothing. Nothing has happened to them or else they're bums. Abra is a great part. I hope you don't die now. I want to use Julie Harris. Do you think I'm nuts? The screen play depends so on her last scene with Adam and on her strength, that I had to have a real real actress. I couldn't find one aged twenty. They're nothing. Proms, dresses, beaus and all that, but nothing for my last scene. Finally I made a photographic test of Julie and she looks twenty when her face is in movement, I think. I'll just have to keep her face in movement. She's a marvelous actress. She is not Abra the way we saw her, but jeezuz I was stuck.
> One pro thing. She and Jimmy Dean look fine together. They look like People, not actors. I'm real pleased with that part of it. Two people. Dean has the advantage of never having been seen on the screen. Harris, practically. (2016: 349)

Harris was a Method actress, so she was more than used to improvisation, having studied under Strasberg and Kazan. Before Kazan was a director, he had also been an actor, so he knew very well how to be captivating and stimulating to fellow actors, since he had a deeper insight of what it was like to be on the other side. The actress got along very well with Dean from the beginning, and had only positive things to say about their experience working together:

> He was always inventing. It was never the same. You didn't know what was coming. So, you had to listen, you had to watch, you had to really be there. And I can't think of acting as saying: 'well you didn't say that before… why don't you… why don't you do it the same way?' No, I think that's not acting. I mean, that is imitating or something. It's not being, because no one does the same thing twice. I mean, in acting we have to say the same words twice, but we don't have to say them the same way, we don't have to say them in the same rhythm.

An actor who did not share Harris' opinions was Raymond Massey (1896-1983), who, to everyone's surprise, Kazan had casted as Adam Trask, father to Cal and Aron. Massey was a conservative and veteran actor who memorized all his lines and read them without a comma different from what they were on the script. It was no wonder that he felt an immediate animosity towards Dean from the moment they started working together. Richard Davalos (1930-2016), who was casted as Aron, Cal's brother, cleverly commented the decisions made by the director: "Gadge's genius is that even before the actors knew each other, he knew how they would react to each other. It was like chemistry" (Davalos *apud* Levene, 1994: 69). Kazan made sure to make a big spectacle of the presentation of Dean to the rest of the cast, as Dennis Hopper comments:

> On *East of Eden*, Kazan had the whole cast line up outside the soundstage. And Kazan said, 'You're gonna meet a boy and he's gonna be very strange to you, and he's gonna be different, but no matter what you see or what you think of him, when you see him on the screen he's gonna be pure gold'. Then he said 'I want you to meet James Dean' and they opened the soundstage door and James Dean came out and went [while giving the finger to everyone] 'Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!' And Raymond Massey was standing there, a very religious man who doesn't like any kind of cussing on the set, he turned to Kazan and he said, 'What price is gold?' (Hopper *apud James Dean: The First American Teenager*, 1975)

Kazan was able to reproduce Dean's damaged relationship with his father by feeding a real-life tension between Massey and Dean, which translated into their performances. When Massey demanded Kazan to discipline Dean, and make him say his correct lines, the director assured him that he would talk to Dean, but instead stood back and simply captured those moments on camera. Additionally, Massey did not approve of Dean's preparation and mediation exercises before each scene, considering them a waste of time for the rest of the crew. His classic acting training clashed in many ways with the new stream of acting led by Kazan: "The Method had encouraged his truculent spirit. Jimmy never knew his lines before he walked on the set, rarely had command of them when the camera rolled and even if he had it was often inaudible. Simple technicalities, such as moving on cue and finding his marks, were beneath his consideration" (Massey *apud* Levene, 1994: 70). As for the director, he was complicit in many ways with Dean's behavior and allowed him to have his meltdowns and walks alone before shootings. Kazan was very aware of what he had in hands, as well as how he could work with Dean:

> Brando was Dean's hero; everyone knew that, because he dropped his voice to cathedral hush when he talked about Marlon. I invited Brando to come to the set and enjoy some hero worship. Marlon did and was very gracious to Jimmy, who was so adoring that he seemed shrunken and twisted in misery. People were to compare them, but they weren't alike. Marlon, well trained by Stella Adler, had excellent technique. He was proficient in every aspect of acting, including characterization and makeup. He was also a great mimic. Dean had no technique to speak of. When he tried to play an older man on the last reels of *Giant*, he looked like what he was: a beginner. On my film, Jimmy would either get the scene right immediately, without any detailed direction – that was ninety-five percent of the time – or he couldn't get it at all. (1988: 658)

In one iconic scene of the film, Cal's father makes him read a few verses from the Bible as a way to discipline him after a violent outburst. Cal, unrepentant from his actions, slouching on the table, with his head resting on his elbow, enrages his father by reading the verse numbers with an uncalled-for emphasis. The climax of the scene needed to be an explosion from the father that, for some reason, Massey was not being able to deliver. Kazan, instead of further instructing Massey and giving him directions, pulled Dean aside and requested him to murmur profanities such as "Fuck shit God and piss on Jesus" (Howlett, 2016: 77) instead of reading his lines. The deeply religious Massey became furious and once again called for Kazan to talk to his co-star. Kazan addressed the situation and explained that he had been the one responsible for Dean's actions, all the while leaving the cameras rolling. In the end he got the reaction he needed from his actors, and that was what Kazan cared about. According to Massey's own recollection of the events:

> Equally annoying was his insistence on going away alone once a scene was rehearsed and leave the rest of us to cool off in our chairs while he communed with himself somewhere out of sight. When he was ready we would hear the whistle 'Gadge' Kazan had given him and he would reappear. We would assemble to our appointed spots and the camera would roll.
> "So Gadge endured the slouchings, the eye-poppings, the mutterings and all the wilful excentricities. He said to me one morning as I waited near my camera marks for that damn whistle to blow, 'Bear with me Ray. I'm getting solid gold!' (Massey *apud* Levene. 1994: 70).

That was not the only time Dean negatively surprised Massey. On another scene, where the family is celebrating Adam's birthday, prodigy son Aron presents his father with the news that he is engaged to his long-time girlfriend Abra. Cal, who had been

secretly saving his earnings to compensate his father from the losses of his business, offers him money instead. Adam, who had rejoiced over Aron's present, refuses to accept Cal's money and urges him to give it back to the farmers who have suffered from speculation over the troubled times of the war. The script instructed Dean to react with a "stare at Adam slowly, as though in a trance... walk over and pickup the money, then give a loud, chocking, agonizing scream and run out of the room" (Dalton, 2001: 169).

Instead, Dean went off script and gave in to his impulses pushing Massey against a wall trying to awkwardly embrace him, while the money all fell on the floor behind them. The image was of a boy completely left without a sense of direction, who thought he had finally found the one thing that would make his father proud of him, and instead he came across rejection once again. Massey who meticulously went by the book, did not expect that reaction at all, and in return kept repeating the name of Dean's character. Kazan did what he knew best, he kept the cameras rolling, and captured one of the most authentic, raw and touching scenes of his portfolio, as Dalton notes:

> But in this climatic moment Jimmy went far beyond the script and allowed his deepest longings to surface. All the years of his life that he had missed a father, the love he longed to give, the anger he couldn't scream, welled up and overflowed onto Massey. Jimmy's clinging, his look of pain, the weak fluttering of the money as it clung to his suit – all unrehearsed and unexpected – horrified Massey, and the camera captures his spontaneous reaction of shock and withdrawal from such an intense expression of emotion. (2001: 169-171)

It is Julie Harris, as Abra, who has one of the most touching lines in the film, while she pleads to a dying Raymond Massey, as Adam Trask, to reconcile with his son. Because there are so many similarities between Dean's character in the film and his own life, the following speech could be addressed to Winton Dean in full:

> Mr. Trask, it's awful not to be loved. It's the worst thing in the world. Don't ask me – even if you could – how I know that. I just know it. It makes you mean, and violent, and cruel. And that's the way Cal has always felt, Mr. Trask. All his life! Maybe you didn't mean it that way – but it's true. You never gave him your love. You never asked for his. You never asked him for one thing… Cal did something very bad, and I'm not asking you to forgive him – or bless him or anything like that. Cal has got to forgive you – for not having loved him – or for not having shown your love. And he has forgiven you. I know he has… But you must give him some sign, Mr. Trask, some sign that you love him – or he'll never be a man. (Nowlan, 2016: 365-366)

The climax of the emotional struggle of James Dean's character Cal,

undoubtedly mirrored his own on the screen. He was kind enough to share his vulnerability with the audience, and that left a lasting impact not only in cinema, but also culturally. Corey Allen (1934-2010), who would later co-star with him in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) considered Dean to be "one of the first people in our business to share his vulnerability, and to say: 'Hey, I have a hump on my back. And the best I can do is to share that with you… and I'm willing to'. I think that's why we identify with him. Because every one of us has a hump on his back somewhere" (*The James Dean Story*, 1957). As Tanitch points out, Kazan could not have had a better casting for Cal:

> William K Zinsser's review of *East of Eden*, (…) had described not just Cal Trask but Jimmy Dean as well: "Everything about him suggests the lonely misunderstood nineteen-year-old. He has the wounded look of an orphan trying to piece together the shabby facts of his heritage. Occasionally he smiles, as if it is some dark joke known only to himself. You sense badness in him, but you also like him".
> Later, when Dean was quoted talking about his mother, it seemed as if Jimmy Dean was quoting John Steinbeck: 'She wouldn't have died on me if I hadn't been bad. She would have loved me and taken care of me. If you couldn't love me nobody can. I have been bad all my life, so I've never deserved anything good.' (Tanitch, 2014: 229)

James Dean would not live to witness the incredible phenomenon of his success, nor to receive his Oscar nomination in 1955 for his role in *East of Eden* – the first posthumous nomination in the history of the Academy Awards. His next film, *Rebel Without a Cause*, consecrated him as a teenage icon for all generations to come. Before Dean, teenagers were portrayed as clichés: they were either model children or juvenile delinquents. *Rebel Without a Cause* shed a different light on teenagers, showing that adolescence did not have to be a burden. In that film he fought against the hypocrisy that his family and society tried to impose on him. He represented what teenagers felt but had not until then found a way to express, and Dean was one of the first courageous actors who was not afraid to share his vulnerability with the world, as Sheen describes:

> "Jim Dean and Elvis were the spokesmen for an entire generation. When I was in acting school in New York, years ago, there was a saying that if Marlon Brando changed the way people acted, then James Dean changed the way people lived. He was the greatest actor who ever lived. He was simply a genius." (Sheen *apud* Dalton. 2001: 488)

Conclusion

The legacy of Elia Kazan will live on not only in his films, but also through the actors and directors he has touched and influenced throughout his career. His approach to Method Acting, in a quest to capture the human nature with as much realism as possible, has allowed for the development of this acting theory in a direction that had previously been abandoned by its predecessor, the System. To many, his techniques to lead his actors towards the outcome he envisioned were unconventional and controversial, nevertheless we must convey that they have served their purpose. The way Kazan photographed his actors gave us a raw and personal account of their struggle but, above all, his wisdom laid many times in the way he did not say cut after a scene, forcing his actors to go off script. The fact that the camera kept rolling made them improvise in order to continue the narrative. Because the training of Method actors implies that they immersed themselves in their character, it allowed in these occasions for perfect and unpredictable natural human reactions that could not have been trained or studied. As an acting school, the Actors Studio remains as relevant and prestigious as when it was founded by Kazan in 1947. It is currently presided by Al Pacino, Alec Baldwin and Ellen Burstyn, and it has since then opened a second location in Los Angeles.

The richness in learning about Kazan's biography before we approached his body of work lies in the fact that they are so intimately tied. His films mirror his cultural heritage, his identity and also his personal path. In the stories he chose to tell, as well as in the actors he decided to cast, particularly for the purpose of this study in the case of Brando and Dean, we can learn as much about them as we do about the director himself. The fact that the Kazan family moved from a warzone in which every day was a test to their survival, to a country that gave them freedom but to which they were never able to fully adapt, shaped the director's personality profusely. Likewise, the fact that he admittedly felt like an outsider all his life, made him work harder to achieve his personal and professional goals.

Another thing he learned quite well was to adapt to any type of situation around him and make the most out of it. In the same way Kazan's father had to adjust his speech when he was in the market trading rugs for "Kazan Carpets Company", the director also adapted his approach when speaking individually to each of the actors he worked with – they each learned to handle their audience. Kazan was a very astute and

ingenious man, who knew exactly which strings to play when he pulled an actor aside, in order to get the actors in the exact mindset that would give him the reaction or emotion he wanted to capture on film. He went as far as to make up realities for their characters, similar to the ones he knew the actors had experienced or that they had shared with him in confidence, and whisper things to them before a scene. In a way he added another dimension to the characters on the script, and encouraged his actors to be creative and reimagine the circumstances of their character.

It is important to understand the type of country Kazan was making films to, and in particular the historical and political constraints of the time period in which he began his career first as an actor and then as a director. During the decade of 1930s, the film industry can be credited to have given the American audience the relief and therapy they needed to get them through the Great Depression, with its glamorous and over the top productions. Nonetheless, that audience changed after World War II, and they wanted films to be truer to life. In 1945, the year that the war ended was also the year that the Motion Picture Association of America was established, to ensure that the Production Code for moral guidelines in the cinema was strictly followed. This implied that many adult films were either curtailed or suppressed, never being played before an audience, or so severely edited that they missed out on their initial purpose.

Directors had to be extremely cautious on how to pass any religious, political or simply cultural message, resorting many times to innuendos or allegories that were so subtle that they could sometimes be missed by the most avid eyes. Director Martin Scorsese has the perfect term for these directors of the late 1940 and 1950s: they were smugglers (*A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies,* 1995). They had to find a way to convey their message without being undermined by censorship. Because there was a need to break these rules, in order to restore the integrity in the creative process of making a film, a few directors began to take action, but it was undoubtedly Kazan who takes the lead. His *A Street Car Named Desire* is the first major breech in Hollywood's Production code. The director understood the need to give audiences what they were looking for, and dedicated his life's work to do so. This is true not only in terms of his approach to acting, but also concerning the themes and stories he selected and decided to tell, that represent the flawed human nature and their struggles. It is obvious that he does not have the sole merit in regards to the outcome, and that we also have to praise the actors who have worked with Kazan and that have allowed him to dive so deeply into their subconscient, their emotions and their personal

struggles. Many names are part of a list of actors who have collaborated with the director, however for the object of this study the focus was on Marlon Brando and James Dean.

In both cases, Kazan can be credited for launching their careers and for giving them their breakthrough roles. Although Brando chose to distance himself from Kazan after *On the Waterfront*, as a result of his conflicted views on the director's testimony before the HUAC, one can argue that Brando's best and most memorable roles were the ones he played along Kazan. We can credit the decay of Brando's career to many different factors, which were not relevant to explore in this context, however the truth is that it was only Francis Ford Coppola, many years later, who was able to revive a bit of Brando's essence in *The Godfather* (1972) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). With Dean the case is different, since we are not able to predict if there would have been room for further collaborations between actor and director had he not passed away so soon. Also, for as much value as the three films of his short career inarguably have, they were shot in a period of only two years, so we can only speculate as to his evolution as an actor.

Both Brando and Dean desperately needed a father figure in their lives, and Kazan in a way occupied that place, even if only for a limited period of time. He was their mentor and guide, and he taught them not only how to approach acting, but also how to face personal issues in their personal lives. He deconstructed many of the trauma and pain that they had stored since their childhood and teenage years, and truly turned it into art. Together they have inspired generations of teenagers to own up to who they really are and not be afraid to express their feelings. They taught us that it is okay to be flawed, and that not all lives have to be perfect, that some of us will have to fight a little harder to get to the place where we are meant to be.

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